

Lots of Limericks

Selected by Myra Cohn Livingston



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This is a rich collection of limericks selected by a widely known anthologist, poet, and limerick enthusiast. Edward Lear, Ogden Nash, Theodore Roethke, X. J. Kennedy, and John Ciardi, among many others, introduce us to such unlikely and likable characters as a young lady from “Woosester” who used to crow like a “roosester,” an old person of Dean who dined on one pea and a bean, and a careless zookeeper named Blake who fell into a tropical lake.

This book’s eleven sections are rich with limericks about birdbrains, peculiar people, strange shapes, fabulous foods, flutes and fiddles, and the holidays. For example:

There was a young lady of Crete,
Who was so exceedingly neat,
When she got out of bed
She stood on her head,
To make sure of not soiling her feet.

With a zany drawing on each section title page, this collection offers an uproarious, imaginative feast of delights from which to choose. It will, as well, inspire readers to write limericks of their own.

Drawings by Rebecca Perry

All ages

Guaranteed Reinforced Binding

Melanie Smith

Lots of Limericks

EDITED BY MYRA COHN LIVINGSTON

DILLY DILLY PICCALILLI:
POEMS FOR THE VERY YOUNG

IF THE OWL CALLS AGAIN:
A COLLECTION OF OWL POEMS

I LIKE YOU, IF YOU LIKE ME:
POEMS OF FRIENDSHIP

POEMS OF CHRISTMAS

WHY AM I GROWN SO COLD?
POEMS OF THE UNKNOWABLE
(Margaret K. McElderry Books)

HOW PLEASANT TO KNOW MR. LEAR!

POEMS OF LEWIS CARROLL

THESE SMALL STONES

ALSO BY MYRA COHN LIVINGSTON

HIGGLEDY-PIGGLEDY:
VERSES AND PICTURES

MONKEY PUZZLE AND OTHER POEMS

REMEMBERING AND OTHER POEMS

THERE WAS A PLACE AND OTHER POEMS

WORLDS I KNOW AND OTHER POEMS
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CELEBRATIONS

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MYTH OR REALITY?

A CIRCLE OF SEASONS

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ESSAYS ON POETRY

EARTH SONGS

MY HEAD IS RED AND OTHER RHYMES

POEM-MAKING: WAYS TO BEGIN WRITING POETRY

SEA SONGS

SKY SONGS

A SONG I SANG TO YOU

SPACE SONGS

UP IN THE AIR

Lots of Limericks

Selected by Myra Cohn Livingston

Illustrated by Rebecca Perry

MARGARET K. McELDERRY BOOKS

To Edmund, Charlotte, and Hannah Hoffman

Margaret K. McElderry Books
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INTRODUCTION

Nobody really knows how the limerick began. Some say that it was a form of popular song sung by a brigade of Irish soldiers who returned from France to Limerick, Ireland, early in the eighteenth century. Others have found that the form appears in a Greek play written sometime between 448 and 380 B.C. and in manuscripts from the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. A limerick even appears in Shakespeare's *Othello*.

We do know that the first book of limericks was published in England as *The History of Sixteen Wonderful Old Women* in 1821. The next year another book appeared in which a verse about a man of Tobago so inspired Edward Lear that, over fifty years later, he patterned his famous nonsense verses on the form. Lear has been called the Poet Laureate of the Limerick.

Today, the limerick is a light verse form which appeals to us through its ridiculous humor, its word-play, and its bouncing anapestic rhythm. Many of the limericks we know are anonymous, but a good many others are always appearing, some written by our best contemporary poets.

This is a selection of 210 of my favorite limericks, old and new, with the hope that you will find some that will also make you laugh, read, and even sing!

—MCL



A Bundle of Birdbrains

I wish that my room had a floor;
I don't care so much for a door;
 But this walking around
 Without touching the ground
Is getting to be quite a bore.

Gelett Burgess

THE GNAT AND THE GNU

"How absurd," said the gnat to the gnu,
"To spell your queer name as you do!"
 "For the matter of that,"
 Said the gnu to the gnat,
"That's just how I feel about you."

Oliver Herford

“This season our tunnips was red
And them beets was all white. And instead
Of green cabbages, what
You suspect that we got?”
“I don’t know.” “Didn’t plant none,” he said.
David McCord

There once was a boy of Bagdad,
An inquisitive sort of a lad.
He said, “I will see
If a sting has a bee.”
And he very soon found that it had.

KEEPING BUSY IS BETTER THAN NOTHING

There was a young lady named Sue
Who had nothing whatever to do
 And who did it so badly
 I thought she would gladly
Have stopped long before she was through.

John Ciardi

There was a young bard of Japan
Whose limericks never would scan;
 When they said it was so,
 He replied: "Yes, I know,
But I make a rule of always trying to get
just as many words into the last line as
I possibly can."

There was a young fellow called Hugh
Who went to a neighbouring zoo.

The lion opened wide
And said, "Come inside
And bring all the family too."

Max Fatchen

THE THINKER

There was a young fellow who thought
Very little, but thought it a lot.

Then at long last he knew
What he wanted to do,
But before he could start, he forgot.

John Ciardi

There's a tiresome young man from Bay Shore;
When his fiancée cried, "I adore
 The beautiful sea!"
 He replied, "I agree
It's pretty. But what is it *for*?"

Morris Bishop

There was a young person called Smarty
Who sent out his cards for a party;
 So exclusive and few
 Were the friends that he knew
That no one was present but Smarty.

There was a young man, let me say,
Of West Pumpkinville, Maine, U.S.A.
You tell me there's not
Such a place? Thanks a lot.
I forget what he did anyway.

David McCord

A WARNING

I know a young girl who can speak
French, German, and Latin and Greek.
I see her each day,
And it grieves me to say
That her English is painfully weak!

Mary A. Webber

There was a young lady from Wooster
Who ussed to crow like a rooster.
 She ussed to climb
 Seven trees at a time—
But her sisester ussed to booster.

Said a lady beyond Pompton Lakes
"I do make such silly mistakes!
 Now the car's in the hall!
 It went right through the wall
When I mixed up the gas and the brakes."
Morris Bishop

There was an old lady named Carr
Who took the 3:3 to Forfar;
For she said: "I conceive
It is likely to leave
Far before the 4:4 to Forfar."

There once was a man who said, "How
Shall I manage to carry my cow?
For if I should ask it
To get in my basket,
'Twould make such a terrible row."

A MAN OF PENNANG

An honest old man of Pennang
once borrowed a friend's boomerang.
"I'll return it," he cried,
and he tried and he tried
—but it always came back to Pennang.

N. M. Bodecker

There was an old man of Khartoum
Who kept two tame sheep in his room:
"For," he said, "they remind me
Of one left behind me,
But I cannot remember of whom."

There was an old looney of Rhyme
Whose candor was simply sublime:
 When they asked, "Are you there?"
 He said, "Yes, but take care,
For I'm never 'all there' at a time!"

Said the crab: "'Tis not beauty or birth
That is needed to conquer the earth.
 To win in life's fight,
 First be sure you are right,
Then go sidewise for all you are worth."
 Oliver Herford

THE YAK

There was a most odious Yak
Who took only toads on his Back:
If you asked for a Ride
He would act very Snide,
And go humping off, yicketty-yak.
 Theodore Roethke



Incidents and Accidents

There was a young farmer of Leeds
Who swallowed six packets of seeds.
It soon came to pass
He was covered with grass,
And he couldn't sit down for the weeds.

There once was a boy of Quebec
Who was buried in snow to his neck.
When asked, "Are you frizz?"
He replied, "Yes, I is,
But we don't call this cold in Quebec."

Rudyard Kipling

APRIL FOOL

At show-and-tell time yesterday
I brought my pet skunk. Sad to say,
 Though it had been well taught
 Not to spray, it forgot.
Now we can't use the schoolhouse till May.
John Ciardi

STICKY SITUATION

Muttered centipede Slither McGrew,
"What on earth can I possibly do?
 Here I'm late for a date
 And foot seventy-eight
Has some chewing gum stuck to its shoe!"
X. J. Kennedy

There once was a big rattlesnake
Who bought him a caraway cake.
 When they said, "You will share
 With your neighbors your fare,"
He said, "That's where you make a mistake!"

A skeleton once in Khartoum
Asked a spirit up into his room;
 They spent the whole night
 In the eeriest fight
As to which should be frightened of whom.

There once was a barber of Kew,
Who went very mad at the Zoo;
He tried to enamel
The face of the camel,
And gave the brown bear a shampoo.
Cosmo Monkhouse

A thrifty young fellow of Shoreham
Made brown paper trousers and woreham;
He looked nice and neat
Till he bent in the street
To pick up a pin; then he toreham.

Going home with her books through the snows,
Went Maude, when a blizzard arose.
Despite winter's blast,
Maude got home at last
But the books had no jackets and froze.

Wallace Tripp

There was once a most charming young miss
Who considered her ice-skating bliss;
 But one day, alack!
 Her skates, they were slack.
And she ended up something like this.

There was a young lady named Hannah,
Who slipped on a peel of banana.
More stars she espied
As she lay on her side
Than are found in the "Star-Spangled Banner."

Cries a sheep to a ship on the Amazon
(A Clipper sheep ship that her lamb is on),
"Remember, dear Willy
The nights will be chilly,
So keep your white woolly pajamas on!"
J. Patrick Lewis

There was a young lady of Spain
Who was dreadfully sick on a train,
 Not once, but again
 And again and again,
And again and again and again.

There was a young girl named O'Neill,
Who went up in the great Ferris wheel;
 But when halfway around
 She looked at the ground,
And it cost her an eighty-cent meal.

There was once a young man of Oporta
Who daily got shorter and shorter,
 The reason he said
 Was the hod on his head
Which was filled with the heaviest mortar.

Lewis Carroll

A small boy, while learning to swim,
Jumped into the water with vim.
 He lit on his sister,
 But wished he had missed her,
For it knocked all the breath out of him.

Elizabeth Gordon

There was a young man from the city,
Who met what he thought was a kitty;
 He gave it a pat,
 And said, "Nice little cat!"
And they buried his clothes out of pity.

A DRIVER FROM DEERING

A school bus driver from Deering
disconcertingly kept disappearing:
he would head for Cape May,
but end up in Bombay
—because something was wrong with the steering.

N. M. Bodecker

There was an old lady of Rye,
Who was baked by mistake in a pie;
 To the household's disgust
 She emerged through the crust,
And exclaimed, with a yawn, "Where am I?"

An obnoxious Old Person named Hackett
Bought a huge trunk and started to pack it.
 When he tripped and fell in it
 And it shut the next minute,
He proceeded to make quite a racket.

William Jay Smith

A mouse in her room woke Miss Dowd;
She was frightened and screamed very loud,
 Then a happy thought hit her—
 To scare off the critter,
She sat up in bed and meowed.

A PERSON IN SPAIN

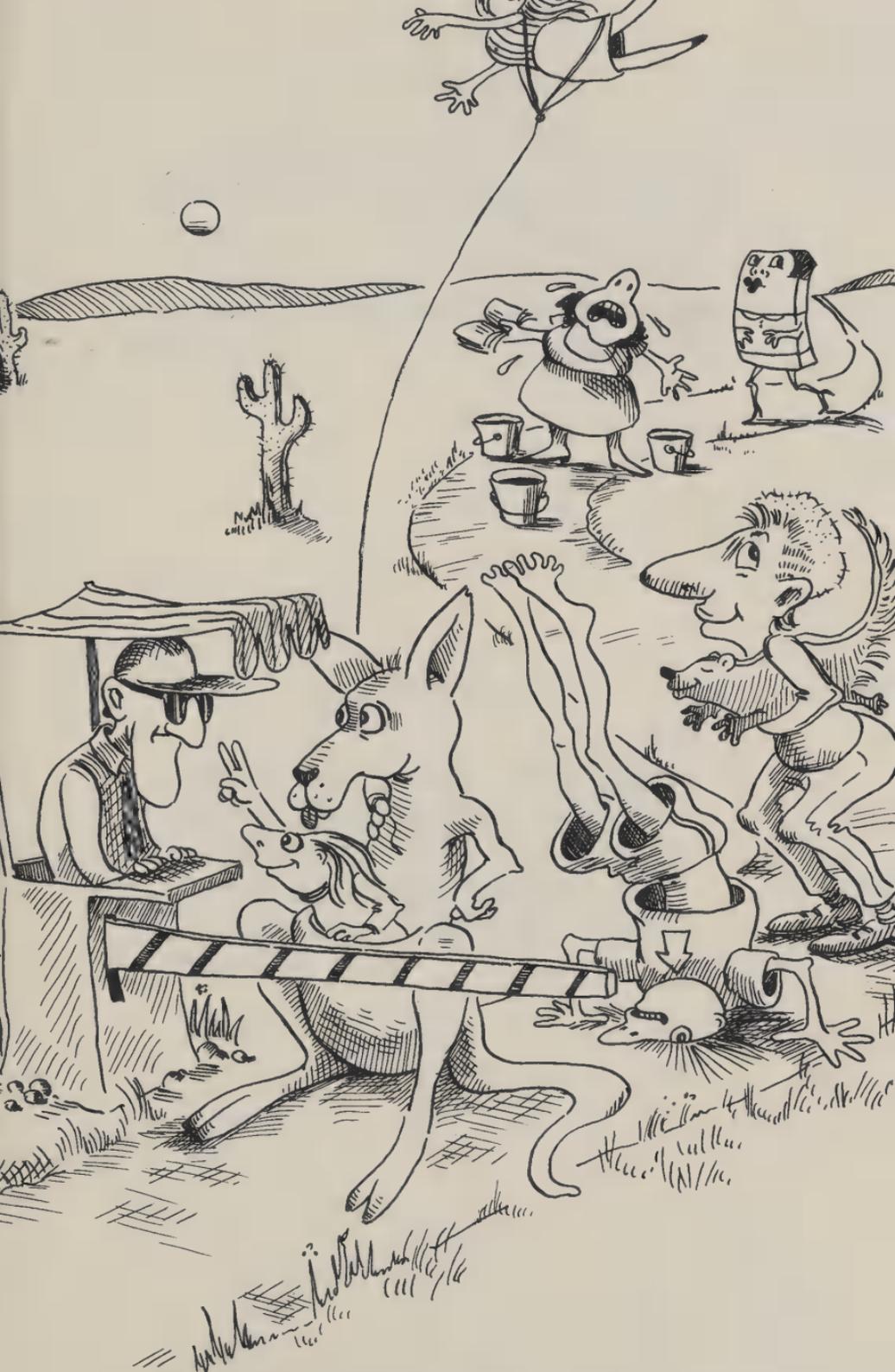
An indignant young person in Spain
looked out at a gray, grimy rain
and cried: "Will you clear!
Who told *you* to come here?
You horrible **Old English Rain.**"

N. M. Bodecker

BE KIND TO DUMB ANIMALS

There once was an ape in a zoo
Who looked out through the bars and saw—YOU!
 Do you think it's fair
 To give poor apes a scare?
I think it's a mean thing to do!

John Ciardi



Peculiar People

A BRIGHT IDEA

A pretentious old man of the Bosphorus
Used to cover his goat cart with phosphorus
So that, driving by night
He would get the green light
And his goats would consider him prosperous.

X. J. Kennedy

A MAN IN A TREE

A furious man in a tree
Said: "What's all this nature to me?
I have looked at the view.
Now what do I do?
I ought to have brung my TV."

N. M. Bodecker

A CRUSTY MECHANIC

There was an old crusty mechanic
Whose manners were fierce and tyrannic:
dull headlights would glare
At his furious stare,
—and dead engines turn over in panic!

N. M. Bodecker

There was a young lady of Crete,
Who was so exceedingly neat,
 When she got out of bed
 She stood on her head,
To make sure of not soiling her feet.

A certain young fellow, named Bobbie
Rode his steed back and forth in the lobby:
 When the clerk said: "Indoors
 Is no place for a horse"
He replied: "But, you see, it's my hobby."

There was a young lady named Ruth,
Who had a great passion for truth.
 She said she would die
 Before she would lie,
And she died in the prime of her youth.

MY SISTER

My sister's remarkably light,
She can float to a fabulous height.
It's a troublesome thing,
But we tie her with string,
And we use her instead of a kite.

Margaret Mahy

There was a young girl of Asturias,
Whose temper was frantic and furious.
She used to throw eggs
At her grandmother's legs—
A habit unpleasant, but curious.

A matron well known in Montclair
Was never quite sure what to wear.
 Once when very uncertain
 She put on a lace curtain
And ran a bell cord through her hair.
William Jay Smith

TENNIS CLINIC

There was a young man from Port Jervis
Who developed a marvelous service
But was sorry he learned it
For if someone returned it
It made him impossibly nervous.
Lillian Morrison

An impressionable lady in Wales
Had a passion for tragical tales;
 The torrents of tears
 That she wept through the years
They came and collected in pails.

Edward Gorey

There once was a person of Benin,
Who wore clothes not fit to be seen in;
 When told that he shouldn't
 He replied, "Gumscrumrudent!" —
A word of inscrutable meanin'!

Cosmo Monkhouse

A man who was fond of his skunk
Thought he smelled pure and pungent as punk.
But his friends cried No, no,
No, no, no, no, no, *no!*
He just stinks, or he stank, or he stunk.

David McCord

Said a restless young person of Yew,
"I will purchase a nice kangaroo;
I can sit in her pouch
And pretend it's a couch
And wherever she hops, I will too!"

Myra Cohn Livingston

Said an Ogre from old Saratoga
I've tried to de-Ogre by Yoga
 I've stood on my head
 all day in my bed
but the mirror still says I'm an Ogre.

Conrad Aiken

Said old Peeping Tom of Fort Lee:
"Peeping ain't what it's cracked up to be;
 I lose all my sleep,
 And I peep and I peep,
And I find 'em all peeping at me."

Morris Bishop

There was an Old Man who said, "Well!
Will *nobody* answer this bell?

I have pulled day and night,
Till my hair has grown white.
But nobody answers this bell!"

Edward Lear

There was a young lady of Ealing,
Who had a peculiar feeling
That she was a fly,
And wanted to try
To walk upside down on the ceiling.

There was a Young Lady of Norway,
Who casually sat in a doorway;
 When the door squeezed her flat,
 She exclaimed, "What of that?"
This courageous Young Lady of Norway.
Edward Lear

There once was a girl of New York
Whose body was lighter than cork;
 She had to be fed
 For six weeks upon lead
Before she went out for a walk.
Cosmo Monkhouse

There was, in the village of Patton,
A chap who at church kept his hat on.
 “If I wake up,” he said,
 “With my hat on my head,
I’ll know that it hasn’t been sat on.”

SOMETIMES EVEN PARENTS WIN

There was a young lady from Gloucester
Who complained that her parents both bossed her,
 So she ran off to Maine.
 Did her parents complain?
Not at all—they were glad to have lost her.

John Ciardi



Strange Shapes

There was an Old Lady named Hart,
Whose appearance gave people a start:
Her shape was a candle's
Her ears like door handles,
And her front teeth three inches apart.

William Jay Smith

There was a young lady of Lynn
Who was so excessively thin
That when she essayed
To drink lemonade
She slipped through the straw and fell in.

There was an old maid of Berlin,
Who was most distressingly thin,
 She was locked out one day,
 But the neighbors all say,
She pushed out the key and crawled in.

Elizabeth Gordon

There was an old fellow named Green,
Who grew so abnormally lean,
 And flat, and compressed,
 That his back touched his chest,
And sideways he couldn't be seen.

A small mouse in Middleton Stoney
Grew pitifully skinny and bony;
 "It's apparent," he said,
 "I'm improperly fed
On a diet of raw macaroni."

Myra Cohn Livingston

There was a young lady named Flo,
Who was fat as a capital O;
 When the people said, "Why
 Is this thus?" she'd reply,
"I suppose it's the way that I grow."

There was a young damsel of Lynn
Whose waist was so charmingly thin,
The dressmaker needed
A microscope—she did—
To fit this slim person of Lynn.

There was an old man of the Cape
Who made himself garments of crepe.
When asked, "Do they tear?"
He replied, "Here and there;
But they're perfectly splendid for shape."
Robert Louis Stevenson

A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

A puppy whose hair was so flowing
There really was no means of knowing
Which end was his head
Once stopped me and said,
"Please, sir, am I coming or going?"

Oliver Herford

There was a small maiden named Maggie,
Whose dog was enormous and shaggy,
The front end of him
Looked vicious and grim—
But the tail end was friendly and waggy.

There was a young angler of Worthing,
Who dug up ten worms and a fur thing.
 He said, "How I wish
 Eleven fine fish
Would snap up these things I'm unearthing."

There was once a young fellow of Wall
Who grew up so gigantically tall
 That his friends dug a pit
 Where he'd comfortably sit
When he wished to converse with them all.

Myra Cohn Livingston

There once was a centipede neat,
Who bought shoes for all of his feet;
 "For," he said, "I might chance
 To go to a dance,
And I must have my outfit complete."

There once was an old kangaroo,
Who painted his children sky-blue;
 When his wife said, "My dear,
 Don't you think they look queer?"
He replied, "I don't know but they do."

An Elephant sat on some kegs
And juggled glass bottles and eggs,
And he said, "I surmise
This occasions surprise,—
But, oh dear, how it tires one's legs!"
J. C. Francis

There was a young man of St. Kitts,
Who was very much troubled with fits;
The eclipse of the moon
Threw him into a swoon;
When he tumbled and broke into bits.

There was an old man of the Nore,
The same shape behind as before.
They did not know where
To offer a chair,
So he had to sit down on the floor.



All in the Head

As a beauty I'm not a great star,
There are others more handsome by far,
 But my face, I don't mind it,
 Because I'm behind it—
'Tis the folks in the front that I jar.

Anthony Euwer

There was an old man of Blackheath,
Who sat on his set of false teeth.
 Said he, with a start,
 "O Lord, bless my heart!
I've bitten myself underneath!"

There was an old man of Tarentum,
Who gnashed his false teeth till he bent 'em.
When they asked him the cost
Of what he had lost,
He replied, "I can't say, for I rent 'em."

There was an Old Man from Luray
Who always had something to say;
But each time he tried
With his mouth opened wide
His big tongue would get in the way.
William Jay Smith

There was a young lady of Kent,
Whose nose was most awfully bent.
 One day, I suppose,
 She followed her nose,
For no one knew which way she went.

There was a Young Lady whose nose
Was so long that it reached to her toes;
 So she hired an Old Lady,
 Whose conduct was steady,
To carry that wonderful nose.

Edward Lear

There was a young lady of Firle,
Whose hair was addicted to curl;
It curled up a tree,
And all over the sea,
That expansive young lady of Firle.

Edward Lear

I'd rather have fingers than toes;
I'd rather have ears than a nose;
And as for my hair,
I'm glad that it's there.
I'll be awfully sad when it goes.

Gelett Burgess

A PERSON IN STIRLING

A silly young person in Stirling
desired her hair to be curling.
Despite curlers and creams
it got straighter, it seems
—but her nose started twisting and twirling.
N. M. Bodecker

There was an Old Person of Dutton,
Whose head was as small as a button;
 So to make it look big
 He purchased a wig,
And rapidly rushed about Dutton.
Edward Lear

From Number Nine, Penwiper Mews,
There is really abominable news:

They've discovered a head
In the box for the bread
But nobody seems to know whose.

Edward Gorey

There was an Old Man with a beard,
Who said, "It is just as I feared!—
Two Owls and a Hen,
Four Larks and a Wren,
Have all built their nests in my beard."

Edward Lear

There was a young man of Devizes,
Whose ears were of different sizes;
 The one that was small
 Was of no use at all,
But the other won several prizes.

There was a young maid who said, "Why
Can't I look in my ear with my eye?
 If I give my mind to it,
 I'm sure I can do it.
You never can tell till you try."

There was a young fellow named Shear
Who stuck a ball-point in his ear.

As he punctured the drum

He said, "That hurts some,

But the rest of the way through is clear."

John Ciardi

There once was a dancing black bear
Who, instead of a hat, wore a pair

Of shoes on his head.

"It's a two-step," he said,

"And it feels like I'm walking on air."

J. Patrick Lewis



Fabulous Foods

A LADY IN MADRID

A lady who lived in Madrid
made soup a way no one else did:
she swallowed some broth
with some herbs wrapped in a cloth,
and covered her head with a lid.

N. M. Bodecker

An epicure, dining at Crewe,
Found quite a large mouse in his stew.
Said the waiter, "Don't shout
And wave it about
Or the rest will be wanting one too."

ARTHUR

There was an old man of Calcutta,
Who coated his tonsils with butta,
 Thus converting his snore
 From a thunderous roar
To a soft, oleaginous mutta.

Ogden Nash

There was a young prince in Bombay,
Who always would have his own way;
 He pampered his horses
 On five or six courses,
Himself eating nothing but hay.

Walter Parke

A discerning young lamb of Long Sutton
Begged his grandfather, "Don't be a glutton;
For you eat up the grass
In a manner so crass
That they'll soon have you carved up as mutton."
Myra Cohn Livingston

There was a young man of Bengal
Who went to a fancy-dress ball,
He went, just for fun,
Dressed up as a bun,
And a dog ate him up in the hall.

They tell of a hunter named Shephard
Who was eaten for lunch by a lephard.
Said the lephard, "Egad!
You'd be tastier, lad,
If you had been salted and pephard."

Said Gus Goop, "That spaghetti was great!
Only—where in the world is my plate?
Something hard as a bullet
Feels stuck in my gullet—
Could it be that canned tuna I ate?"

X. J. Kennedy

THE PROVIDENT PUFFIN

There once was a provident puffin
Who ate all the fish he could stuff in.
Said he, " 'Tis my plan
To eat when I can:
When there's nuffin' to eat I eat nuffin'."
Oliver Herford

A PROFESSOR CALLED CHESTERTON

There was a professor called Chesterton,
Who went for a walk with his best shirt on.
Being hungry he ate it,
But lived to regret it,
As it ruined for life his digesterton.
W. S. Gilbert

There was a young pig who, in bed,
Nightly slumbered with eggs on his head.
When the sun at its rise
Made him open his eyes,
He enjoyed a quick breakfast in bed.

Arnold Lobel

There was an old man from the Rhine
Who was asked at what hour he would dine.
He replied, "At eleven,
At three, six, and seven,
At eight and a quarter of nine."

There was a young lady named Perkins,
Who had a great fondness for gherkins;
 She went to a tea
 And ate twenty-three,
Which pickled her internal workin's.

There was a young man so benighted,
He never knew when he was slighted.
 He went to a party,
 And ate just as hearty
As if he'd been really invited.

There was a sad pig with a tail
Not curly, but straight as a nail.
So he ate simply oodles
Of pretzels and noodles
Which put a fine twist to his tail.

Arnold Lobel

There was a fat lady from Eye
Who felt she was likely to die;
But for fear that once dead
She would not be well-fed,
She gulped down a pig, a cow, a sheep, twelve
buns, a seven-layer cake, four cups of coffee,
and a green apple pie.

There was an old person of Dean
Who dined on one pea, and one bean;
For he said, "More than that
Would make me too fat."
That cautious old person of Dean.

Edward Lear

There was an old person of Leeds,
And simple indeed were his needs.
Said he: "To save toil
Growing things in the soil,
I'll just eat the packets of seeds!"

THE UNFORTUNATE GIRAFFE

There was once a giraffe who said, "What
Do I want with my tea strong or hot?
For my throat's such a length
The tea loses its strength,
And is cold ere it reaches the spot."

Oliver Herford



Odd Numbers and Outer Space

IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE

There once was a Martian named Zed
With antennae all over his head.

He sent out a lot
Of di-di-dash-dot
But nobody knows what he said.

John Ciardi

Doctor Who, I am forced to admit,
Is a booby, a crackpot, a twit.
Other Time Lords all laugh
When he trips on his scarf
That took X plus Y light years to knit.

Charles Connell

A scientist living at Staines
Is searching with infinite pains
 For a new type of sound
 Which he hopes, when it's found,
Will travel much faster than planes.
 R. J. P. Hewison

A Martian named Harrison Harris
Decided he'd like to see Paris;
 In space (so we learn)
 He forgot where to turn—
And that's why he's now on Polaris.
 Al Graham

A luckless time-traveler from Lynn
Leaned too close for a look and fell in
 To a puddle of slime
 On the first day of time
And so, naturally, couldn't have been.

X. J. Kennedy

There was a young lady named Bright,
Who traveled much faster than light.
 She started one day
 In a relative way,
And returned on the previous night.

Said the condor, in tones of despair:
"Not even the atmosphere's rare.
 Since man took to flying,
 It's really too trying,
The people one meets in the air."

Oliver Herford

Young Frankenstein's robot invention
Caused trouble too awful to mention.
 Its actions were ghoulish,
 Which proves it is foolish
To monkey with Nature's intention.

Berton Braley

There was an Old Man of the Hague,
Whose ideas were excessively vague;
 He built a balloon,
 To examine the moon,
That deluded Old Man of the Hague.

Edward Lear

There was an old man who said, "Do
Tell me *how* I should add two and two?
 I think more and more
 That it makes about four—
But I fear that is almost too few."

There was an old man who said, "Gee!
I can't multiply seven by three!
 Though fourteen seems plenty,
 It might come to twenty—
I haven't the slightest idee!"

'Tis a favorite project of mine
A new value of π to assign.
 I would fix it at 3
 For it's simpler, you see,
Than 3 point 1 4 1 5 9.

Harvey L. Carter

Cried a man on the Salisbury Plain
"Don't disturb me—I'm counting the rain;
Should you cause me to stop
I might miss half-a-drop
And would have to start over again."

Myra Cohn Livingston

PHILANDER

A Man named Philander S. Goo
Said, "I know my Legs Add up to Two!
But I count up to One,
And I think I am Done!—
Oh What! Oh what what can I DO?"

Theodore Roethke

There was an old fellow of Trinity
Who solved the square root of Infinity,
 But it gave him such fidgets
 To count up the digits,
He chucked Math and took up Divinity.

LET X EQUAL HALF

A mathematician named Bath
Let x equal half that he hath.
 He gave away y
 Then sat down to π
And choked. What a sad aftermath.
J. F. Wilson

A mathematician named Lynch
To a centipede said, "It's a cinch;
 With your legs I've reckoned,
 That I'll know in a second,
Just how many feet in an inch."

A bridge engineer, Mister Crumpepp,
Built a bridge for the good River Bumpett.
 A mistake in the plan
 Left a gap in the span,
But he said, "Well, they'll just have to jump it."

Said Mrs. Isosceles Tri,
"That I'm sharp I've no wish to deny;
But I do not dare
To be perfectly square—
I'm sure if I did I should die!"

Clinton Brooks Burgess

Said Rev. Rectangular Square,
"To say that I'm *lost* is not fair;
For, though you have found
That I never am round,
You knew all the time I was there."

Clinton Brooks Burgess



Flutes and Fiddles

An extinct old ichthyosaurus
Once offered to sing in a chorus;
 But the rest of the choir
 Were obliged to retire,
His voice was so worn and sonorous.

There was an old person of Tring
Who, when somebody asked her to sing,
 Replied, "Isn't it odd?
 I can never tell 'God
Save the Weasel' from 'Pop Goes the
 King!'"

There were three little birds in a wood,
Who always sang hymns when they could.

 What the words were about
 They could never make out,
But they felt it was doing them good!

An opera star named Maria
Always tried to sing higher and higher,
 Till she hit a high note
 Which got stuck in her throat—
Then she entered the Heavenly Choir.

There was an Old Man of the Isles,
Whose face was pervaded with smiles;
 He sang "Hum dum diddle,"
 And played on the fiddle,
That amiable Man of the Isles.

Edward Lear

"Now just who," muses Uncle Bill Biddle,
"Drilled a dreadful big hole through my fiddle?
 When I play a folk air
 Air is all there is there
And my tune comes out minus its middle."

X. J. Kennedy

There was an Old Man with a gong,
Who bumped at it all the day long;
 But they called out, "Oh law!
 You're a horrid old bore!"
So they smashed that Old Man with a gong.
Edward Lear

There was a Young Lady of Tyre,
Who swept the loud chords of a lyre;
 At the sound of each sweep
 She enraptured the deep,
And enchanted the city of Tyre.
Edward Lear

There was a Young Lady whose chin
Resembled the point of a pin;
 So she had it made sharp,
 And purchased a harp,
And played several tunes with her chin.

Edward Lear

A boy who played tunes on a comb,
Had become such a nuisance at home,
 That ma sparked him, and then—
 “Will you do it again?”
And he cheerfully answered her, “Nomb.”

A bugler named Dougal MacDougal
Found ingenious ways to be frugal.

He learned how to sneeze
In various keys,
Thus saving the price of a bugle.

Ogden Nash

A tutor who tooted the flute
Tried to tutor two tooters to toot,
Said the two to the tutor,
"Is it harder to toot or
To tutor two tooters to toot?"

There was a Young Lady of Bute,
Who played on a silver-gilt flute;
She played several jigs
To her Uncle's white Pigs:
That amusing Young Lady of Bute.

Edward Lear

There was a young pig from Chanute
Who could pipe little songs on a flute.
When she practiced her scales,
A large crowd of snails
Came to listen, enrapt in Chanute.

Arnold Lobel

A farmer in Knox, Ind.,
Had a daughter he called Mar.
 But the neighbors said "O,
 We really must go,"
Whenever she played the p.

There was a young lady of Rio,
Who essayed to take part in a trio;
 But her skill was so scanty
 She played it andante
Instead of allegro con brio!



Wordplay and Puns

PITCHER McDOWELL

A farm team pitcher, McDowell,
pitched an egg at a batter named Owl.
They cried: "Get a hit!"
But it hatched in the mitt
—and the umpire called it a "fowl!"

N. M. Bodecker

Once a grasshopper (food being scant)
Begged an ant some assistance to grant;
But the ant shook his head,
"I can't help you," he said,
"It's an uncle you need, not an ant."

Oliver Herford

A handsome young noble of Spain
Met a lion one day in the rain.
 He ran in a fright
 With all of his might,
But the lion, he ran with his mane!

A father once said to his son,
"The next time you make up a pun,
 Go out in the yard
 And kick yourself hard,
And I will begin when you've done."

A maiden caught stealing a dahlia,
Said, "Oh, you shan't tell on me, shahlia?"
 But the florist was hot,
 And he said, "Like as not
They'll send you to jail, you bad gahlia."

A barber who lived in Batavia
Was known for his fearless behavia.
 An enormous baboon
 Broke in his saloon,
But he murmured, "I'm blamed if I'll shavia."

A beautiful lady named Psyche
Is loved by a fellow named Yche.
 One thing about Ych
 The lady can't lych
Is his beard, which is dreadfully spyche.

A Boston boy went out to Yuma
And there he encountered a puma—
 And later they found
 Just a spot on the ground,
And a puma in very good huma.
 D. D. (in Boston Transcript)

There's a girl out in Ann Arbor, Mich.,
To meet whom I never would wich.,
 She'd eat up ice cream
 Till with colic she'd scream,
Then order another big dich.

There was a young maiden called Eighmy,
Who was a good girl all the seighmy.
 At nine every night
 She'd kneel and recight
A little verse called "Now I leighmy."

An unpopular youth of Cologne,
With a pain in his stomach did mogne.
 He heaved a great sigh
 And said, "I would digh,
But the loss would be only my ogne."

An old couple living in Gloucester
Had a beautiful girl, but they loucester;
 She fell from a yacht,
 And never the spacht
Could be found where the cold waves had
 toucester.

A rather polite man of Hawarden,
When taking a walk in his gawarden,
 If he trod on a slug,
 A worm or a bug,
Would say, "My dear friend, I beg pawarden!"

A painter who came from Great Britain
Hailed a lady who sat with her knitain.
 He remarked with a sigh,
 "That park bench—well, I
Just painted it, right where you're sitain."

A girl, who weighed many an oz.
Used language I dared not pronoz.
 For a fellow unkind
 Pulled her chair out behind
Just to see (so he said) if she'd boz.

A lady who lived in Mont.
Had a beautiful daughter named H.,
 Who once took a seat
 On Twentieth Street,
Having slipped on a piece of ban.

A flea and a fly in a flue
Were imprisoned, so what could they do?
 Said the fly, "Let us flee."
 Said the flea, "Let us fly."
So they flew through a flaw in the flue.

I've drowned seventy ants in a pool,
I've burned down five rooms of the school,
I've stolen six pies
And told terrible lies
But they'll never catch this April Fool!

Ann Story

It's neither amusing nor funny
To feel any love for a bunny
Who hops all around
Hiding eggs on the ground
When he skips me and never leaves unny.

R. H. Marks

FOURTH OF JULY

Hurrah for the Fourth of July
When fireworks burst in the sky!

All you need is a match

And a quick little scratch

And a rocket and fuse and _____G

GOOD-BYE

Myra Cohn Livingston

THE HALLOWEEN HOUSE

I'm told there's a Green Thing in there.

And the sign on the gate says BEWARE!

But of course it's not true.

That's why I'm sending you

To sneak in and find out—*but take care!*

John Ciardi

SAID THE MONSTER

Said the Monster, "You all think that I
Love to lunch on the folks who go by.

If only you knew

I'd much rather chew

On a peppery cheese pizza pie!"

Lilian Moore

The Pilgrims ate quahaugs and corn yet,
Which gourmets would scorn through a lorgnette.

For this kind of living

They proclaimed a Thanksgiving.

I'm thankful I hadn't been born yet.

Ogden Nash

AN ODD ONE

There once was a finicky ocelot
Who all the year round was cross a lot
Except at Thanksgiving
When he enjoyed living
For he liked to eat cranberry sauce a lot.

Eve Merriam

There is a young reindeer named Donder,
Of whom Santa couldn't be fonder;
 But he falls off the roofs
 When his four little hoofs
Impatiently cause him to wander.

J. Patrick Lewis

A woman named Mrs. S. Claus
Deserves to be heard from because
 She sits in her den
 Baking gingerbread men
While her husband gets all the applause.

J. Patrick Lewis



The Very End

A careless zookeeper named Blake
Fell into a tropical lake.

Said a fat alligator
A few minutes later,
“Very nice, but I still prefer steak.”

A certain young man of great gumption,
Among cannibals had the presumption
To go—but, alack!
He never came back.
They say 'twas a case of consumption.

A collegiate damsel named Breeze,
Weighed down by B.A.'s and Litt. D.'s,
 Collapsed from the strain.
 Alas, it was plain
She was killing herself—by degrees.

A daring young lady of Guam
Observed, "The Pacific's so calm
 I'll swim out for a lark."
 She met a large shark . . .
Let us now sing the Ninetieth Psalm.

A decrepit old gasman, named Peter,
While hunting around for the meter,
 Touched a leak with his light;
 He rose out of sight—
And, as anyone who knows anything
 about poetry can tell you, he also
ruined the meter.

A sea-serpent saw a big tanker,
Bit a hole in her side and then sank her.
 It swallowed the crew
 In a minute or two,
And then picked its teeth with the anchor.

AN EXPLORER NAMED BLISS

An intrepid explorer named Bliss
fell into a gorge or abyss,
But remarked as he fell:
“Oh I might just as well
get to the bottom of this . . .”

N. M. Bodecker

On a day when the ocean was sharky
Archaeologist Arthur McLarky
For a quick dip dived in,
But along came a fin—
All they found was his shovel and car key.

X. J. Kennedy

Said a foolish young lady of Wales,
"A smell of escaped gas prevails."
Then she searched with a light,
And later that night
Was collected—in seventeen pails!
Langford Reed

There once was a man in the Moon,
But he got there a little too soon.
Some others came later
And fell down a crater—
When was it? Next August? Last June?
David McCord

There once was a man who said, "Why
Can't I look that big snake in the eye?"

The snake said, "You can,"

And he looked at the man.

(Most any last line will apply.)

There once was a plesiosaurus
Which lived when the earth was all porous.

But it fainted with shame

When it first heard its name,
And departed long ages before us.

There once was a scarecrow named Joel
Who couldn't scare crows, save his soel.
But the crows put the scare
Into Joel. He's not there
Any more. That's his hat on the poel.

David McCord

There once were two cats of Kilkenny,
Each thought there was one cat too many;
So they fought and they fit,
And they scratched and they bit,
Till instead of two cats there weren't any.

There was a young fellow named Hall
Who fell in the spring in the fall.

'Twould have been a sad thing
Had he died in the spring.
But he didn't—he died in the fall.

There was a Young Person named Crockett
Who attached himself to a rocket;
He flew out through space
At such a great pace
That his pants flew out of his pocket.

William Jay Smith

There was a young woman from Niger
Who rode on the back of a tiger.

They returned from the ride
With the lady inside
And a smile on the face of the tiger.

There was a young fellow named Weir,
Who hadn't an atom of fear;

He indulged a desire
To touch a live wire;
(“Most any old line will do here!”)

There was a Young Lady of Ryde
Who ate a green apple and died;
 The apple fermented
 Inside the lamented,
And made cider inside her inside.

There was an Old Lady named Crockett
Who went to put a plug in a socket;
 But her hands were so wet
 She flew up like a jet
And came roaring back down like a rocket!

William Jay Smith

When a jolly young fisher named Fisher
Went fishing for fish in a fissure,
 A fish, with a grin,
 Pulled the fisherman in.
Now they're fishing the fissure for Fisher.

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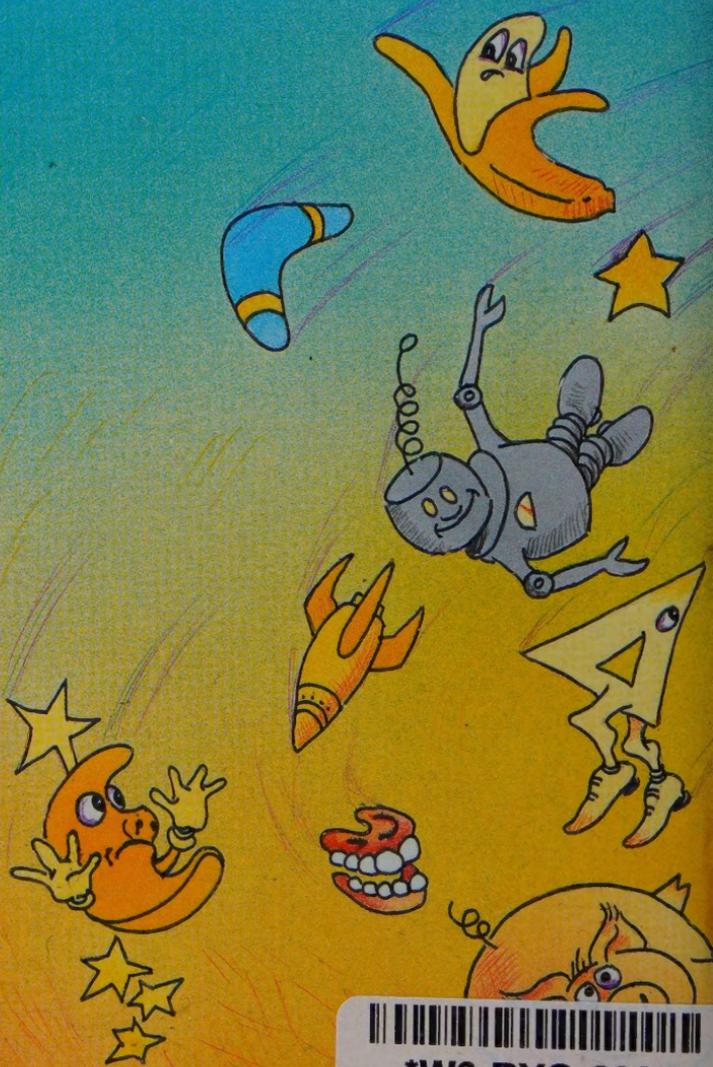
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