

◆ The boy who loved words ◆

There are, in this world, people who are born collectors. Some collect shells or stones. Others, feathers. Some have even been known to collect tiny teaspoons. Such a one was Selig. He was a collector of words.

Selig loved everything about words—the sound of them in his ears (*tintinnabulating!*), the taste of them on his tongue (*tantalizing!*), the thought of them when they *percolated* in his brain (*stirring!*), and, most especially, the feel of them when they moved his heart (*Mama!*).



Whenever Selig heard a word he liked, he'd shout it loud, jot it down on a slip of paper, then stuff it into his pocket to save. Such a collector! Selig's pockets positively brimmed with words. He stuffed new ones inside his shirt, down his socks, up his sleeves, under his hat.

While other children busied themselves with bats, nets, and all manner of balls, Selig stayed on the outskirts, always on the *periphery*—listening and collecting delicious words.

His father, a practical man who sold sturdy shoes for a living, wondered what good could possibly come from a son with such a strange *predilection*.



His mother, a large, lovely woman from the Old Country, worried—could her beautiful boy find happiness? Waving her arms in the air, she was a *windmill* of worry.

As time went on, people began calling Selig by a new name: Wordsworth. “Hey, Wordsworth,” kids would giggle. “Here’s a word for your collection—*Oddball!*”

“*Oddball*”, Selig repeated. The silly sounding word should have made him *giggle*, but instead it made him lonely.

One night, Selig had a dream... Alone, in front of an unusual *emporium*, he encountered an oversized *amphora*. Curious, Selig gave it a tap. Swoooooosh! Out

popped a swarthy, swirling man. “Djinn” Selig explained, then, “Genie!” he shouted, enjoying the tang of tasty new words.

“Vhat you vant?” the Genie asked. “A vish?”

Such strange and savory sounds! Such an offer! At a loss for words, Selig suddenly knew his vish – it was for an answer. “Is it true, am I really...an oddball?”

“Oddball? Feh! You are Voldsworth, a lover of voids. Already you have vhat people search their whole life for—an enthusiasm, a *passion*. Vhat you need now is a poipose, a mission.” Then, without a word of warning, the Genie disappeared.

Selig awakened from his dream... *Lickety-split*, he packed a *rucksack* with a pillow and blanket, apples, honey, cream soda and his entire collection of words. He knew exactly what he had to do. Selig took to the road, determined to find his purpose.



On the trail of his purpose, Selig’s senses sharpened. He noted the nod and *toddle* of tulips in the wind; the sway and *swagger* of tree branches; how, at evening, the light dimmed to announce the arrival of twilight and stars. *Dusk*, Selig noted, adding that short and enchanting word to his collection.

But in time Selig’s step grew heavy. Under the weight of so many words, it was harder and harder to move. He was *shuffling* and *shambling* when he might have been *rambling* and *ambling*. Perhaps what he needed to do was lighten his load. But HOW? Throw words away? Waste them? Impossible! They were far too precious!

Selig was too tired to think. His exhausted brain could imagine but one thing—*slumber*, a splendid word! Sadly, he was too sleepy to write it down.

In front of Selig stood a large and lovely tree. He removed his jacket, stuffed, like his mama’s *strudel*, with words. Tenderly, he hung each word on its own separate branch, as if putting it to bed for the night.

With a sip of cream soda and a nibble of honeyed apple, Selig *clambered*, then curled in a *crook* of the tree. *Snug*, he thought, and fell directly to sleep. Comfortably cradled there,



he dreamed of his mama, his mission, and macaroons—his favourite cookie.

During the night, a pacing poet, unable to sleep for want of a word, found himself under the same tree, guzzling hopelessly at the moon. Night after night, he'd been struggling to find the right words to describe it.

Suddenly, mysteriously, a swirling wind blew up. Four of Selig's words sailed off their branches. Reaching skyward, the distracted poet caught them. Discarding the word macaroon, he held tightly to *lozenge*, *lemon* and *licorice*.



"The moon," he wrote in his notebook, growing more and more excited with each word, "melted like a *lemon lozenge* in the *licorice* sky".

"My stars!" the poet shouted, exultant. "That's it!"

The following morning Selig awoke to what could only be called a *rhapsody* of birds and words. The poet was reading his newest poem aloud—a poem *chocablock* with Selig's words!

Wiping the sleep crumbs from his eyes, Selig scrambled down the tree and saluted the poet. "Your poem," he told him, "contains some of my favourite words. How beautifully you use them."

"Why, thank you. For once, the words just seemed to come to me. Upon my word! How lucky I am! What, may I ask, is your name? I should like to dedicate my poem to you."

For a moment, Selig *hesitated*. Then, suddenly, for the first time ever, he proudly *proclaimed*, "They call me Wordsworth".

It was then that Selig realized his mission. It was spreading the word—sharing his words with others!

From that day forth, Selig's steps were light and filled with purpose. Ever the collector, he added new words as it pleased him. But now, whenever he felt word-heavy, he discovered the ideal places to *sprinkle*, *disburse*, and *broadcast* them.

In that way, a baker whose pastries had always been ignored, found his shop filled with a mob of hungry customers. When the baker's back was turned, Selig, on the macaroon break, had tossed some of his favourite words into the air. *Crispy* and *crunchy* landed next to the crumpets. *Scrumptious* fell against a loaf of pumpernickel. *Luscious* leaned against a layer cake. "Upon my word! How lucky I am!" the baker exclaimed when he turned back and saw his voracious new customers.



Neighbours realized they were bickering when the words *fuss*, *hubbub* and *jibber-jabber* rained down on them... and stopped their fighting.

Selig watched them grow still and gaze kindly upon one another after he cast *hush*, *harmony* and *chum* in their direction.

And so, by word of mouth, the legend began...

"It's Wordsworth," people would whisper, when, suddenly, the right word occurred to them. "He is near," they would nod, knowingly, "Upon my word! How lucky we are!"

Years passed. Selig was a man now, also a myth. But while he delighted in his work, he found that, once again, he was lonely. "Solo", he sighed.

One day, after launching the words *limber*, *spry*, and *gusto*, toward an aging, unhappy man, Selig heard a sound on the breeze. A single, *pulsing*, marvelous note floated through the air and found its way straight into his heart. "*Mellifluous!*" he exclaimed.

Pursuing that perfect note, Selig found a young woman seated by a lake, playing a *lute*. Suddenly, his heart was *aflutter*. *Tremulously*, he asked, "M-m-may I have a word with you? Wh-wh-what is your name?"

"They call me Melody," the young woman sang out. The music of her voice, combined with the charm of her words was, to Selig, the sweetest of all songs.

It was love at first listen. Together, they journeyed back to Selig's hometown, to his mother and father. What a reunion! How his mother smiled when she saw them! Worried that they looked thin, she cooked Selig's favourite foods—brisket,



dumplings, plum crumble, *strudel*, and, of course, macaroons. To comfort their tired feet, Selig's father *cobbled* the couple his sturdiest shoes.

Rested and restored, Selig resumed his life's work, joyfully gathering and scattering words on the wind. Since then, word by word, *legions* of lucky people have discovered and delighted in them.

You too may find yourself lucky if, one day, while you are thinking or writing or simply speaking, the perfect word just seems to come to you. If so, you'll know that Selig is near. And, on special days, if you feel like humming or suddenly bursting into song, you'll know that Melody is with him. "Upon my word!" you may say, "How lucky I am!"



GLOSSARY (in alphabetical order)

AFLUTTER – beating quickly

AMBLING – walking easily

AMPHORA – two-handled vase

BROADCAST – to spread widely over an area

CHOCKABLOCK – crowded

CHUM – friend, pal

CLAMBERED – climbed with hands and feet

COBBLED – put together

CRISPY – firm, fresh, easy to crumble

CROOK – a bend or curve

CRUNCHY – crackling fresh

DISBURSE – to distribute, pass out

DJINN – genie, magical person who grants wishes

DUSK – dark part of twilights

EMPORIUM – large store

ENCOUNTERED – met

EXULTANT – full of joy

FUSS – unneeded excitement

GIGGLE – to laugh in a silly way

GUSTO – great enjoyment

HARMONY – a feeling of agreement

HESITATED – waited because of being unsure

HUBBUB – loud, mixed-up noise

HUSH – be quiet

JIBBER-JABBER – nonsense talk

JOT – to write quickly

LEGIONS – large numbers

LEMON – yellow, like the fruit

LICKETY-SPLIT – very fast, right away
LICORICE – black, like the candy
LIMBER – able to bend easily
LOZENGE – small candy, sometimes with medicine in it
LUSCIOUS – rich and delicious
LUTE – a guitar-like musical instrument
MACAROON – a chewy cookie, usually almond flavoured
MAMA – Mother, Mum, Mommy
MELLIFLUOUS – sweet-sounding
MYTH – a legend or old story about a hero
ODDBALL – strange person
PASSION – strong feeling
PERCOLATED – passed through
PERIPHERY – outside edge
PREDILECTION – fondness for, liking
PROCLAIMED – announced in a fancy way
PULSING – beating like a heart
RAMBLING – taking time to wander
RHAPSODY – expression of enthusiastic feeling
RUCKSACK – knapsack
SAVORY – flavourful, sometimes spicy
SCRUMPTIOUS – walking unsteadily
SHAMBLING – walking unsteadily
SHUFFLING – walking without lifting your feet
SLUMBER – sleep
SNUG – cozy
SOLO – alone
SPRINKLE – to scatter in drops
SPRY – lively, full of energy
STIRRING – exciting
STRUDEL – pastry with filling

SWAGGER – a way of moving as if you are proud of yourself
SWARTHY – dark-skinned
SWIRLING – whirling
TANTALIZING – making you want even more
TINTINNABULATING – making a sound like bells
TODDLE – a wobbling, unsteady motion
TREMULOUSLY – shaking from nervousness
VORACIOUS – extremely hungry
WINDMILL – a spinning machine with arms driven by wind

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The boy who loved words
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