

A RED STAR FOR MISTER CHIPPER

by

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One upon a time there was a little boy called Mr. Chipper. He had hair as bright and shiny as a brand-new penny. When people asked him what color his hair was, Mr. Chipper always said, "Red." He knew that he had red hair because every night, after he had a bath, he looked in the mirror and saw that his hair was red. That was easy to remember. He liked the color red, and he had a lot of hair.

Now Mr. Chipper liked the color red better than any other color in the whole world. But the only red thing that Mr. Chipper had was a pair of red rubber boots. It is easy to see why if you will look at Mr. Chipper and his red boots.

Try to imagine what would happen if the red in the boots was placed next to the red in Mr. Chipper's hair. Do you think that the two reds would look very happy with each other? No! So that's why Mr. Chipper's mother would let the only thing red he could have be boots. She said that boots were as far away from his hair as anything else could possibly be -- and if Mr. Chipper had to have something red, it had better be boots. In between the red hair and the red boots, Mr. Chipper wore a green coat. That helped make the distance between the two reds seem even greater -- or so Mr. Chipper's mother thought.

Now Mr. Chipper lived on a country road. If he stood at his front window long enough, he could see all the people who lived on the road as they passed by -- Jean, a flute player; Doné, a teacher; and Fernando, an artist.

But sometimes Mr. Chipper got tired of standing at the front window, waiting for all these people to pass by. Then he would put on his green coat, and his red boots (which were as far away from his hair as possible). And Mr. Chipper would go walking up the road.

First he would stop at Jean's house. Jean was always playing the flute. "Playing the flute is a very serious and a very beautiful business," she would say to Mr. Chipper.

Then he would stop to see Don, who was always correcting papers. "Teaching is a very serious and a very beautiful business," he would tell Mr. Chipper.

Finally Mr. Chipper would stop to see Fernando, who was always painting. "Painting is a very serious and a very beautiful business," Fernando would tell him.

Then Mr. Chipper would turn back down the road and follow his red boots (which were as far away from his hair as possible) until he was home again.

One very cold winter night Mr. Chipper stood at his front window looking at stars. Most stars are white, or green, or blue. But this night Mr. Chipper saw a red star.

"That is your star, Mr. Chipper," his mother said.

"You have red hair and red boots. Now you have a red star, too."

"I would like to hang that star in my room," Mr. Chipper said. "Then it would shine at night when I go to sleep. If I woke up, I could still see my red star." So Mr. Chipper reached up for the red star, which was still shining brightly in the cold winter night. But he had forgotten that he was in the house, and he touched the window instead.

So Mr. Chipper put on his green coat and his red boots (which were as far away from his head as possible) and went outside into

the cold winter night. He could still see his red star, but though he stretched and stretched with all his might, he couldn't reach the star, no matter how hard he tried. And this time there was no glass in between.

Mr. Chipper took one more long look at his red star, whining away up there in the cold winter night. Then he went back into the house, took off his green coat and his red boots (which were as far away from his hair as possible) and said to his father, "Show me how to build a stairway. I will have to climb very high to reach my red star. I want to bring it back with me and hang it in my room. Then it will shine at night when I go to sleep. And if I wake up, I'll still be able to see my red star."

"It will take a long time to build a stairway that will reach up to your star, Mr. Chipper," his father said. "But I will help you as much as I can."

The very next morning, after Mr. Chipper had put on his green coat and his red boots (which were as far away from his hair as possible), they began building. They started in with hammers and saws, and soon they were making a tremendous racket.

"Will you be hammering long?" Jean called from her doorway. "I can't hear myself play the flute when you make so much noise."

"How can I correct my papers?" Don said, "with all that hammering going on."

"And what about my painting?" Fernando asked. "Besides, what are you building a stairway into the sky for?"

"I want to go up very high," Mr. Chipper said, "so that I can pick my red star, and bring it back with me, and hang it in my room, so that it will shine when I go to sleep at night."

"In that case," Jean said politely, "it does not matter how much noise you make. Once, as I was playing my flute, I, too, reached out for a star. Playing a flute is a very serious and a very beautiful business." And with that she went back to her flute, and never once complained of the noise of the hammers and saws.

"I also know something about stars," Don said. "Once, as I was teaching, I, too, reached out for a star. Teaching is a very serious and a very beautiful business. By all means, go on with your stairway. I will forget about the noise." And with that he went back to his papers, and never once complained of the noise of the hammers and saws.

"About stars, I am an authority," Fernando said. "Once, as I was painting, I, too, found a star. Painting is a very serious and a very beautiful business. I wish you good luck with your stairway." And with that he went back to his paints, and never once complained of the noise of the hammers and saws.

Soon, however, Mr. Chipper had built his stairway so far up into the sky that no one could hear the noise of the hammers and saws at all. In fact, he was soon so high that he disappeared into the clouds, and they couldn't even see him any longer.

Then all the neighborhood gossips said to Mr. Chipper's mother and father, "That is the last of Mr. Chipper. People come to no good end when they build that high. You'll never see Mr. Chipper again. How foolish of you to let him build so high!"

But of course, that is always the way it happens. As soon as you build so high that people no longer can see what you are doing, they say you have lost your way and will never come back. That,

naturally, is nonsense.

Mr. Chipper's mother and father knew that the neighborhood gossips were wrong, because once in a while chips from the stairway would fall down out of the sky. Some people thought it was snow, but they were wrong. These were chips, not snowflakes. But some people never believe the truth, even when it walks up to them and says hello. A chip or two would fall down from the sky, and Mr. Chipper's father and mother knew that he was going up, and up, and up.

Mr. Chipper had been away for a long time when one day they heard a strange noise in the sky. This time it was not the noise of hammers and saws. Instead it was a soft ker-plunk, ker-plunk, ker-plunk. They looked up the stairway, and what do you think they saw? Mr. Chipper in his green coat and his red boots -- which were as far away from his hair as possible -- coming down the stairs, very slowly, and very carefully. And what do you think he was holding in his hands? The red star?

"I had to make the stairway very high to reach my red star," Mr. Chipper said. "Now I can hang it in my room. Then it will shine at night when I go to sleep. If I wake up, I'll still be able to see my red star."

When Jean, and Don, and Fernando came to admire his red star, Mr. Chipper said to them, "Building a stairway to pick a red star is a very serious and very beautiful business." At this Jean, and Don, and Fernando nodded

their heads, all three of them at once. They knew about stars.

Of course, some people said it wasn't a red star at all that Mr. Chipper had brought back with him. They said it was his heart that he hung in his room instead. But that is the way it always happens. Some people never believe the truth, even when it walks up to them and says hello.

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