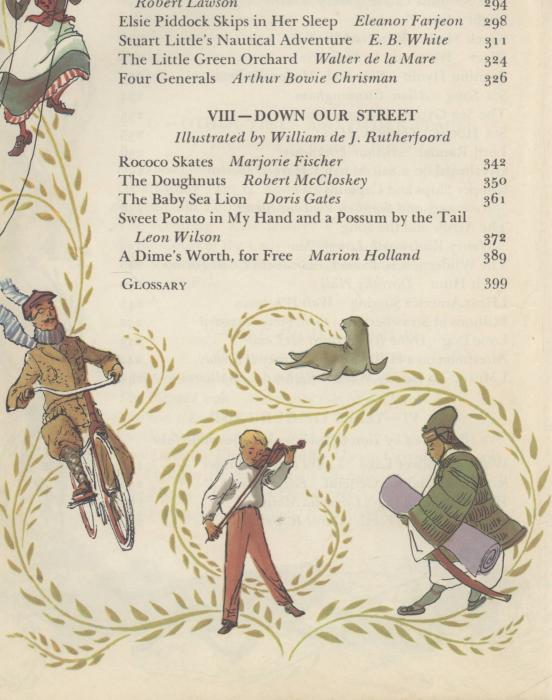


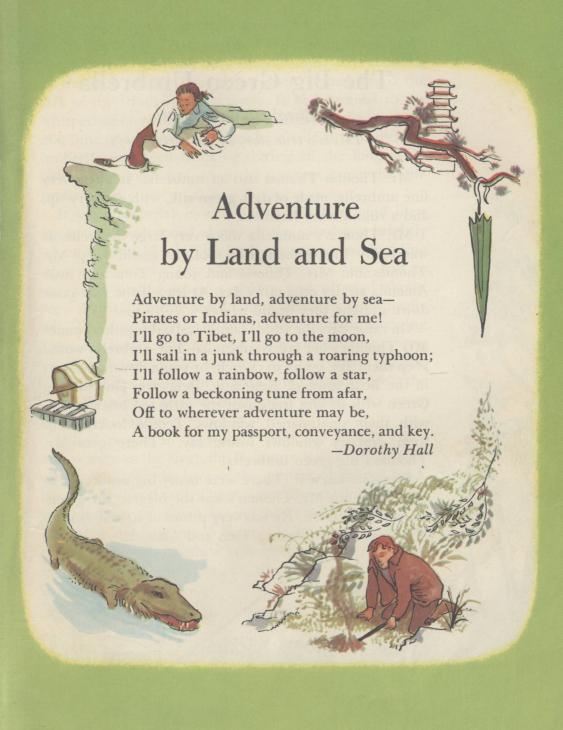
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The Big Green Umbrella

Elizabeth Coatsworth

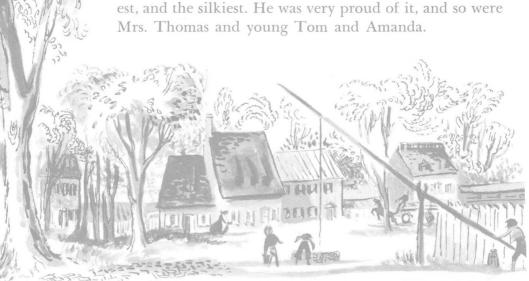
This is a true story of the early 1800's.

Mr. Thomas Thomas had an umbrella. It was a very fine umbrella, made of dark green silk, with an ivory tip, and a round ivory handle.

Mr. Thomas's umbrella was a very large umbrella. It was really like a small silk roof. It would keep Mr. Thomas and Mrs. Thomas and young Tom and little Amanda all dry on a rainy day. At least if the rain came down straight, they would be dry.

On rainy days the whole family walked together, under Mr. Thomas's big green umbrella. The umbrella would keep them dry, going to church, or going down the street in the little town of Newcastle, Delaware, past the big Green with its elm trees, past the little red brick houses with their small-paned windows. People looking out from upstairs windows would say, "There goes Mr. Thomas's big green umbrella!"

Everyone knew it. There were many big umbrellas in Newcastle, but Mr. Thomas's was the biggest, the greenest, and the silkiest. He was very proud of it, and so were Mrs. Thomas and young Tom and Amanda.



But one day the umbrella seemed to grow tired of its life in Newcastle. It grew tired of keeping the rain off the Thomases on rainy days and on sunny days standing in the dark corner behind the door. It had heard the talk of the winds from far away. It had listened to the whispering of raindrops which had seen all the world at one time or another. Goodness knows what thoughts the umbrella had been thinking during all the long hours behind the door! But when the moment came, the umbrella acted.

It was a Saturday morning in April. The wind blew fresh, the clouds raced overhead, the sun shone brightly when it shone at all. The birds sat among the budding trees and sang for joy, though sometimes they had to stop their singing when a sudden gust of wind almost blew their tails inside out. It was a wild day, but a lovely day. The dogs barked, the little boys flew their plunging kites, the horses trotting over the cobbled streets threw up their heads at the blowing bits of paper, and the Thomas family went for a walk. Mr. Thomas took the umbrella along, because in April a shower may come up at any minute.

When people in Newcastle went for a walk, they always went to the river, the Delaware River, whose wide waters ran along the back of the gardens of the red brick houses on the shore. There were always things to be seen on the river, a flock of wild ducks bobbing about, or fishermen in their small boats. Or it might be a big clipper ship with its white sails spread, sailing down the river for South America, or the ports of Russia, or far-away China.

On this April morning, such a ship was standing off



the shore, its sails taut with wind, its figurehead gallantly rising and falling.

"She's from Philadelphia," Mr. Thomas remarked. "Probably bound for the Pagoda Anchorage."

"I wish I were on her," said young Tom.

"So do I," said little Amanda.

"Pooh, you'd be sick!" cried Tom.

"No more than you!" cried Amanda.

"Hush, children," said gentle Mrs. Thomas. "See, it's beginning to rain." Yes, the clouds had suddenly gathered. A minute ago the sun was shining, and now the rain was falling!

Mr. Thomas put up the big green silk umbrella, and all the Thomases gathered under it, like chickens under a bush when the rain begins. Had the umbrella heard what the children said? Who will ever know?

Suddenly an unexpected gust of wind arose, stronger than any of the others. It pushed its way under the green umbrella. Umbrella and wind together struggled to pull the ivory handle out of Mr. Thomas's grasp.

the ivory handle out of Mr. Thomas's grasp.
Mrs. Thomas smothered a scream. The children

knocked against Mr. Thomas's elbows. The umbrella, like a thing gone mad, whacked against Mr. Thomas's fine beaver hat and sent it spinning. As Mr. Thomas reached one hand out to catch his hat, the umbrella gave a wicked twist, and it was free!

Above the meadow the umbrella went, now near the ground, now high in the air, like a big green flower, like a tumbling toadstool. Now it floated like a jellyfish, now it soared upward like a kite, now it turned head-overheels like a boy at play.

It was soon over the river, frightening a flock of ducks, which flew up quacking and spattering water in their wake. A fisherman saw it and began to row desperately after the flying umbrella. But he and his little boat were left far behind.

The rain had stopped now. The sun was out again. In a row, the Thomases stood and watched the great green umbrella, which had been their pride, dancing and bowing and twirling above the river. It was scarcely larger than a thimble now. Sometimes they couldn't see it, and then they would catch a glimpse of it again, dark against the white sails of the clipper ship which it seemed to be approaching.

Then they could see it no more.

"If only my hat hadn't blown off!" sighed Mr. Thomas. "I might have held it."

"No one could have held that big umbrella in such a wind," soothed Mrs. Thomas.

"We'll never have another umbrella like that," whimpered Amanda.

"There's not another umbrella like it in the world," said young Tom solemnly.





"The wind's gone down," said Mr. Thomas. "I suppose our umbrella's in the Delaware by now."

"It will float for a while," murmured Mrs. Thomas. "And then I suppose it will sink."

"And scare the fishes," Tom suggested hopefully.

"Perhaps it will keep the sunshine off the fishes as it used to keep the rain off us," said Amanda.

"Anyhow, it's at the bottom of the Delaware by now," said Mr. Thomas. "I'm sorry, for it was a fine umbrella. We'll never see it again."

Mr. Thomas was an upright man, the head of a good firm of lawyers, a deacon of the church, a kind husband, and an indulgent father. He set the children a splendid example by never making a remark unless he was sure that he was right.

But on this fine blowy April Saturday morning, Mr.

Thomas was as wrong as wrong could be. The umbrella was *not* at the bottom of the Delaware, or even on the top of it among the waves. And he was mistaken in other ways besides.

By Clipper to China

Captain John DeWitt of the clipper ship *Commerce* was walking the deck on this fine April morning thinking what a fine ship his was, and what a good crew he had signed on, and how well the first mate was handling the business of sailing the vessel down the river.

Off for China! That was an exciting thought at the beginning of each voyage. To sail half-way round the world to trade with the Chinese, to fill the hold with sweet-smelling tea and to buy fine dishes and embroidered shawls for his wife, surely that was a fine kind of voyage to make. It was much pleasanter than bringing iron ore from Archangel, or hides and tallow from the Spanish Missions on the coast of California. The day was part of his mood, very gay and bright and wild. Suddenly, something caught his eye. It bobbed and winked at the captain.

"That's a funny bird," he thought. But his sharp sailor's eyes told him immediately that it was no bird.

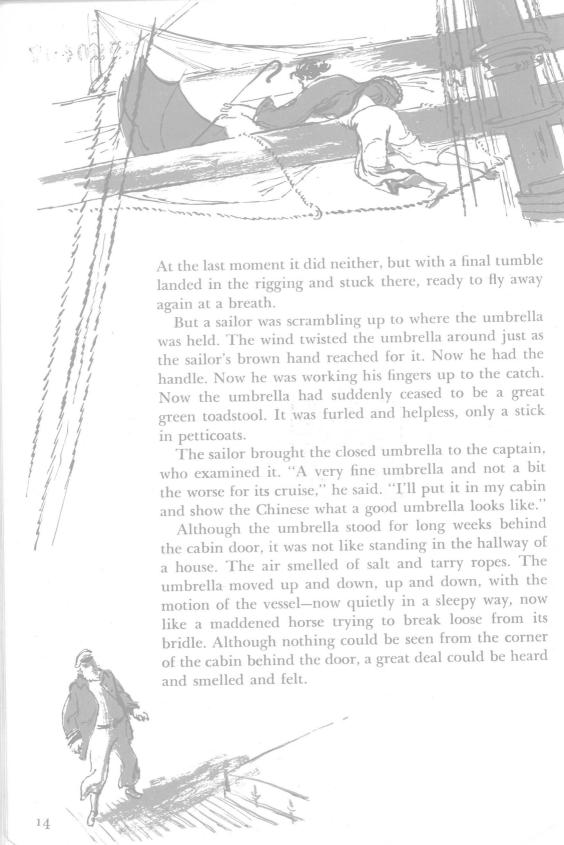
"A kite?" But it hadn't a kite's shape.

Dancing, leaping, tumbling, the thing approached nearer. "An umbrella!" exclaimed the captain, and laughed.

The umbrella seemed to be on a frolic, so full of high spirits that it couldn't behave the same way for two seconds on end. Now it appeared about to leap into the river, now it changed its course to skim over the masts.







Land air has a different smell. First come the sea birds on the borders of the ocean, and then come the land birds, singing and twittering. The *Commerce* moved smoothly now on a quiet river. There were cries of rivermen, unlike the sounds of American voices, and smells of gardens and incense and dead fish.

When the *Commerce* came to anchor there were temple bells, too, in the distance, and Chinese voices conferring with Captain DeWitt in the cabin. But still nothing could be seen.

Then one day it rained, slats of rain falling on the cabin roof like a bamboo curtain falling with a sharp sound. And that day the great green umbrella with the ivory handle came out of its hiding and saw China.

If I should tell you all that the umbrella saw, I should have to tell you all about China. For it saw everything. It saw the blue-clothed crowds, with pigtails hanging down their backs, the women with bound feet in little embroidered slippers, the children in bright clothes. It saw the river boats with big eyes painted on each side of the prows, the dark temples opening on streets so narrow that the umbrella touched walls on each side. Indeed, the streets were so very narrow, and the green umbrella was so very large, that hundreds of Chinese had to pass under it as it moved along, and they all gave it a glance of interest and admiration.

An Umbrella for Peach Blossom

The merchant who was in charge of loading the *Commerce* looked at the umbrella with interest and admiration, too. "A very fine umbrella," he said in Chinese.





"A very fine umbrella," the interpreter repeated in English.

"It is yours," declared Captain DeWitt, for the captain and the merchant were always giving each other presents.

So that afternoon the umbrella started off with a slim yellow hand on its ivory handle, and a grave Chinese face like an old idol's in its green shade.

When the merchant reached his home, he went directly into the part of his house where the women of the family lived, to show them the new umbrella. The women liked to see things which came from across the sea. They were used to smaller parasols made of glazed paper. They laughed and stared at the great big green umbrella as large as a little, little house.

Peach Blossom, the merchant's youngest daughter, was more interested than any one else. "It is so strange," she exclaimed. "I have never seen such a thing."

The merchant smiled at her. "It is yours," he said. "But you must have one of the servants hold it for you when it rains. It is too large for your little hands."

So the umbrella became Peach Blossom's. It went out into the garden in the courtyard to keep her dry when it rained. A big peasant woman held it, while Peach Blossom tripped along on her tiny feet, bringing food for the goldfish in the rain-speckled pond under the

