THE WRITING OF "BRANTA" AND OTHER AFFECTIONS

An Essay by Walter Wangerin, Jr.

One: Wild Things

Maurice Sendak once told me of the furor that followed the publication of his children's book, *Where the Wild Things Are*. In picture and elementally simple language, the story follows a small boy to bed, and then into his vivid, funny, and sometimes disquieting imagination as the bedroom itself morphs into a terrible woods and frightening creatures appear: the wild things. Many parents and some reviewers were downright upset that small children would see such stuff. They believed it would damage the children, implanting frights and fears in innocent brains, inspiring nightmares. Sleep? Sendak hath murdered sleep.

But the book prevailed, Sendak told me, because the book was right. It was the tender-hearted parent, the hyper-solicitous reviewer that was wrong. Far from inaugurating fears in children, such books as his gave a habitation and a name to fears the children *already* experienced, but amorphously, perplexedly.

One of the most important commandments for the creation of an effective children's tale is: thou shalt not condescend!

Adults who write to their *image* of a child, rather than writing to genuine children, do in a real sense utter baby talk. And they miss the mark of a child's complex, intense experience. They make a conventional assumption of pastel innocence, angelic goodness, fresh unsullied souls ("trailing clouds of glory do we come/From God, who is our home")--and in consequence their language lisps, their menu of topics is reduced to the sugar cookie, and their attitude is offensive. Even as they presume to know better than the child, they present a teller and a tale too simple and simply *less* than a child can

(and ought to, and wants to) experience. Simpletons tell simplistic tales.

But in fact, as Maurice Sendak knows and has demonstrated over and over (*In the Night Kitchen, Outside Over There*) stories can embrace all of the basic truths of this existence. They can confront every form of difficulty (remember? Remember? Don't you remember the thicket in which you lived as a child?) because children are already experts in difficulty! And having both acknowledged and named the difficulties which children had only callowly sensed before, the plots of these stories can carry the child through difficulty toward a blessed, credible conclusion. And such conclusions to plots are, as you know, solutions to problems, now discovered not in rational explanations, but in experience.

+ + +

Two: The Robber Under My Bed

Let the adult write stories to the child *he* was and *she* was years ago, to the interior of such that child, where emotions spiked and sank with extreme--not to say "world-shaking"--intensity. For what child does not already know fears as doomful as darkness and the void? What child has not felt soul-pangs of guilt? And jealousy? What child has not laughed with such a helpless delight that heaven was surely at hand?

William Blake wrote two sets of poems not so much for children (though children are quite able to receive them) as *about* children. The first set he called *Songs of Innocence*, from which, this example: "'Twas on a Holy Thursday, their innocent faces clean/The children walking two & two, in red & blue & green..." ["Holy Thursday I] The second set, which matches the first in titles, but contrasts it in vision, he called *Songs of Experience*: "Is this a holy thing to see,/In a rich and fruitful land,/Babies reducd to misery,/Fed with cold and usurous hand?" [from "Holy Thursday II]

Blake was well aware that a child's heart knows both delight and despair. But knows it mutely (lacking a language to frame, form, or confront it). Knows it lonely (if no one can companion the child through the halls and tunnels of her interior life). Knows it meekly and weakly (since, without a name for the experience, the experience is much larger than her own powers of control and survival).

But it is the well-told story that can lend form and companionship and a name to the raw, inchoate experience!

By *story* the child might survive--particularly because story does not move by the cold calculations of reason, but rather by the swift and sensuous experiences of *imagination*.

So let me tell you the story of a story--and of stories in general, how they work. For when I was young and very young, I had already begun to "story" my universe, and by the force of imagination (by the shape of this storying) to make some sense of it. This is the writer's craft and the child's natural response, the child's native ability; child and artist both draw, by the same sensitivities, upon the same resources. There is a kinship here which rational thought and analytic adulthood can cancel. But the child alone with his imagination lacks (as the following example illustrates) one essential for the safe, persuasive conclusion of the story-experience: an external story-teller, a companion of love and authority to validate the imaginative flights of the child.

\+ + +

Once upon a time, when I was six--in the autumn of the year when I was in the first grade and walking some distance to and fro the schoolhouse--there was a robber under my bed.

This is, as the best of stories always are, the truth.

Every night when my brother and I ascended the steps into our attic-bedroom, I knew with dreadful conviction that the robber had already secreted himself beneath our double-bed mattress. Such knowledge caused in me several sorts of torment: for my

own skin, should he reach up and snatch me, yes. Of course. But that was the least of my worries. I worried rather more for my brother Paul, one year younger than I and completely oblivious of such proximate horrors; and I was in a state of trembling responsibility for the rest of my family. Robbers destroy. They can, of a sudden, break out and kill everything a small boy loves.

I was the oldest child of four-and-a-half children. I had been given the name of my father: Walter, as he was Walter. I was the only one in day-long school. I was the only one aware of the robber. Upon me, and upon no other, had fallen the task of preserving my family alive. That was the greatest torment of all.

The attic in which we slept was an attic. Dad had built walls into it, hiding the darker corners and the insulation and the rib-like trusses; and then he had said to us, "Your new bedroom." But we knew better. It smelled like a attic. The ceiling slanted as low as attic ceilings slant. There was one window at the far end, small and slashed by branch-shadows in the night: 'twas an attic. Where else would a canny robber choose to hide? Surely not in warmer bedrooms below. Rather, in the alien spaces, in the hedges and the fences at the edge of civilization: in otherness.

I was, it must be recorded, not altogether without advantage. I knew the rules of the game. For example, I knew that the robber was there, but the robber didn't know that I knew. Nor would he, if he could possibly help it, reveal himself to me--in which case the jig would be up, and though he might rush a-slaughtering through our house, he'd never get anything for it. Therefore, as long as I played innocent--and as long as I stayed awake, thereby giving him good reason to stay concealed beneath the bed--I could control the situation and preserve my dear ones alive. It was a frightfully dicey balance. It was, after all, a mortal game. And it was exhausting me.

Well, every night I made much noise as Paul and I ascended the stairs. And I talked loudly, jovially to my brother while we changed into pajamas--as if all were truly well, and I was happy. (I spent energies, you see, in two opposing directions: upon my

own private fears and my stratagems, and also upon a false, huffing happiness.) And once we were in bed, and in the dark, and watching the choppy-fingered shadows upon the window, I told Paul stories. I continued the stories until he fell sweetly asleep. And then I forced myself even then to talk, to talk, and so to keep the robber in hiding and my family out of danger.

But a child can keep up such midnight watches only so long.

And then he cracks.

One evening in October, my mother said, "Time for bed."

Paul cheerily began to trot toward the door and the steps up to our attic.

I, on the other hand, astonished myself by saying, "No."

I, in my extremity; I, at my wit's end, spontaneously and in genuine anguish, said, "No, Mom. No."

"What?" said the mother who, being unused to disagreement, was herself somewhat astonished. "What did you say?"

"I can't, Mom," I said. "We can't. We just can't go to bed."

"Yes, you can," she said, her eyes flashing. I recall that she was sitting in a living room chair at that moment. "And, Wally, you *will!"*

She didn't understand, of course. But her not understanding would be the death of me. I broke into tears.

"Wally?" she said, more softly. "What's the matter?"

"Oh, oh," I sobbed.

"Tell me," she said.

And I told her. I said, "There's a robber under our bed. Every night, a robber--"

"Oh, Wally!" Mom expostulated. "You know better than that."

"No, Mom! No!" I earnestly argued, opening my eyes wide. "There *is!* He's there right now."

Mom looked at me a moment. Then, abruptly, she stood up. "Come with me,"

she said, and marched toward the attic door.

Oh, how my heart kicked and blamed me then! My mother is a bold woman. Mostly, that was good. But this time it could kill her.

"Mom! Mom! You don't understand!"

I raced after her. I would have run up the steps first, if I could have. But she was the swifter. Up the steps she strode. I rushed after her. But when I reached the top of the staircase, she was already at the side of my bed, bending at the hips. She reached and took hold of the bedspread where it hung to the floor. And then, in a grand, dramatic, sweeping motion--and with a cry of "See?"--she snatched spread and blankets and sheet off the bed entirely, opening the under-bed caverns for my inspection.

Slowly I bent, too. And I saw: dust bunnies, comic books, junk--and no robber....

...*that* night!

And Paul was staring at me now. The boy at five had just encountered two explanations of a serious sense of trouble: our mother's rational and evidential "proofs" of its absence; and my "storied" version, which acknowledged its reality, but which at the same time offered some slight advantage to the kid who knew the rules.

Which do you think he would believe? Well, the question is better put: which *form* was more congenial to his child's mind? Yes: mine. Yes: story, because children by nature solve problems by imagination, by giving personalities, person*hoods* to the abstractions they cannot otherwise understand.

Therefore, Paul and I were together convinced *not* that the robber did not exist, but rather that the robber was still watching outside the window, still waiting to clamber in.

Clearly, the adult method of empirical analysis neither persuaded us nor could comfort us. What it did accomplish, however, was the opposite of our mother's intent: it removed from us the best ally we might have had, an adult who would not only enter the premises of "story" as I had spontaneously begun to write it; who would not only accept

this personification of evil; but who would also take upon herself the role of story *teller,* by plot and imagination to walk us through the evil to a sweet solution/conclusion.

For, there *was* an evil abroad. There was an evil horribly near.

At school I discovered that I could no longer count on the goodness of other people. Nor could I, outside of my home's environment, always find a motive for the "bad" things they did. Laws were lost. Good order was exploding. For there was a fellow in the sixth grade, huge, his face blazing with pimples, who greeted me regularly with a hit to the solar plexus. And there was a widow-woman up the road whom other youths tormented mercilessly--until, that very autumn!--she came walking down my street at night in her nightgown, confused, weeping, barefoot and crazy. I never saw her again after that. Where did she go? And why would people want to hurt her?

Evil had entered my life. The shards and pieces of evil, miserably disconnected. Evil which, should it invade the consoling home, could destroy those dearest to me. A bewildering evil before which I was completely helpless. Ah, but I could--this nascent story-teller could--invoke fantasy to "story" it! And I did: I embodied formless evil in a figure, the robber, and I wrote into my story (what the credible universe of any story must have) contingent rules of action, by which rules the major character of the tale (that was me, of course) could find *some* advantage over evil after all.

Mom's methods did not solve the problem.

Nor can the children's story which refuses to acknowledge evil in a child's life solve the problem it will not name.

But the story that attends to the real problems of the child's existence can solve them, precisely because it <u>is</u> a story, and only a story. Fairy tales are a "safe" way to live through difficulty, since all the horrors are present and apparent and suffered--but only fantastically, in imagination. In imagination, too, they are overcome.

On the other hand, the tools of the triumph are often discovered within the hero of the story, with which the child-listener of the story is invited to identify. That is to say:

the *tools* are not merely fantasy; they are real characteristics heretofore unrecognized by the child, but brought forth into his consciousness and placed into his hand as a real-world advantage when he encounters real-world problems. Hansel and Grethel discover bravery and trust/trustworthiness in one another and cleverness, by which they triumph over the witch that would eat Hansel for dinner. And the child listening to the tale (who may have already experienced the fears of being abandoned by his and her parents) now *experiences* the power of bravery and trust and planned cleverness. And Branta learns the power of a self-giving love (which is the real and deeper tool represented by the Golden Stone). And these tools, as I say--being discovered in ones self--are not themselves merely stuff of fantasy. They are real. And they are the child's ever thereafter.

If the tale-teller is an adult who sees more than her child had seen in himself.

Moreover, the very form and the plot-order of the story becomes a map through some very real thickets of difficulty yet ahead for the child. And the value of this map is that it was drawn in experience, not in merely rational explanations. Explanations are printed on the brain alone, after which the child must labor to recall them and revise them to new circumstances and apply them. Note: the *child* must, perhaps when she is weakest, labor toward her own solution. But experience is printed upon the child whole, mind and emotion and senses and affections and fears and delights, available even to spontaneous action and response--for the child has been here before, has acted suddenly and passionately to meet this difficulty before, has laughed in victory before, but all in imagination.

In other words (and to use another, more substantial metaphor) the child has uttered the name of this thing before, knows its name by heart, and can control and command by the use of that name.

+ + +

Three: A Local Habitation and a Name

In the Book of Genesis, chapter thirty-two, the Patriach Jacob, returning to the land of his birth, fears to meet his older brother Esau, from whom he had usurped both his birthright and his father's blessing. Twenty years before, Esau had sworn to kill him. Jacob seeks to appease his powerful brother by sending ahead of himself all his goods in waves and waves as gifts for Esau. (Look how rich he has become! And look how generous!) Over the deep gorge of the Jabbok, Jacob sends all his cattle, all his serving people--even his wives and his children. And now it is night. And now the man named *Jacob*, the "Trickster," the "Usurper," is alone.

No, not altogether alone. "And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day."

A man: much more than a man.

And that wrestling match must have been titanic, since the patriarchs of Genesis were considered to have been both mighty and massive. (For didn't Jacob use a stone as his pillow, once? And wasn't that stone still there for people to see?--a monument of proportions immovable!)

"Let me go," that figure says, "for the day is breaking."

Such seeming fear of the daylight makes Jacob think he's wrestling a night spirit--some sort of divinity, one powerful enough to have put his own hip out of joint. Therefore, at one point Jacob makes a most telling request:

"Tell me, I pray, your name."

Why the name, particularly?

Well, In those days it was believed that numinous beings surrounded human

beings invisibly, with extraordinary powers to determine their lives, but from whom the humans could not by their own strength free themselves. (This is not unlike all the forces that children believe to exist in their worlds, the Sendakian "Wild Things" over which, when yet unstoried, the children have no power, but which affect them personally and specifically.) Now, if one of these spirit beings became visible, became tangible in the visible sphere of life, where humans themselves lived; and if the human who encountered it could learn its name, (1) that human learned also the spirit's nature and its intent; (2) that human could, by uttering the name, summon it, obligate it, command it.

In fact, Jacob is wrong. This is no mere spirit of the night. This is the Lord God (with remarkable love paying attention to a single human), who does not permit his mystery or his freedom to be touched. Therefore Jacob's opponent deflects his request with a rhetorical question: "Why is it that you ask my name?" and refuses to give the name till later, later.

But I tell that story here for the value of Jacob's presumption: even as he might have reversed his relationship with a spiritual (bodiless, powerful, amorphous) being by learning its name and thereby taking command, so children can (truly!) reverse *their* relationships with the powers which *they* believe to surround them ... by learning the names of these powers; by learning the name of the experience of one's encounter with these powers.

And stories *are* such names! The stories whole, I mean. And not the mute words printed up a page, but the *experience* of the child who enters the tale and lives it: that is, altogether, in all its parts, the name.

Oh, and there's one other element I want to take from Jacob's tale. God (for God it is that wrestles with him, and God is always was against whom *he* striven, even when he thought the opponent nought but a night spirit, even when he thought his opponents nought but his brother Esau or his uncle Laban), God, I say, also asks Jacob for *his* name, and Jacob complies: "My name is Jacob, the Trickster, the Usurper." Then God the

Creator, God the Wrestler, changes Jacob's name, thereby giving Jacob a whole knew identity--and making the man also intensely aware of his identity: "Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." *Israel:* a pun. It is explained here to mean one who strives "with" God--but is that *against* God? Or *beside* God, on his side? Hum.

Yet my point here is this: that the child who engages as fully and as personally with a story as Jacob here engages with the deity at the edge of the Jabbok (both wrestling and answering questions, talking, dialoguing) may, like Jacob, discover a piece of her *own* identity, and call her *own* self by name. To identify well with a major character in a story *is* to identify oneself.

\+ + +

But now that I have established the paradigm of story as a name and a naming, let me offer a more particular explanation of how it works for the child. I'll develop this same paradigm, by further reference to the same rich source by which I came to understand it: the Book of Genesis and the Hebrew notions of language implied in the creation narratives of chapters one, two, and three.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" ... by speaking them. Recognize an elemental simplicity in this Hebraic record of creation: the divine utterance ("Let there be light") did not command, as if the light itself were a separate entity, capable of obedience; nor did the divine word design light or else manufacture light (in which case God's word and the light would be separate things, one the subject, the other its object). No: the word *was* the light! They were one and the same thing, "Light" and the light. So if, for example, a child were asked what the act of creating must have looked like, she might picture the holy mouth of God opening wide, then issuing forth a beam of universal light exactly as a song might go forth from the mouth of God into all the universe.

But the language of stark creation was only one of the languages which the

Creator used. There are two kinds of divine talk remembered in Genesis, for what God had made he also *named*. Light and its temporal period he called "day." Its dimming and the period of its absence he called "night." The firmament he called "heaven," the dry land "earth," the gathered waters, "seas," and so forth.

Now, it is of crucial importance to understand that this naming did more than associate a particular sound with a particular thing (as modern societies use names as pointers merely, signs not much different from highway signs: *Chicago, 120 miles*. The highway sign isn't *actually* Chicago, of course: it says, "Chicago is that-a-way.") God's naming did more than produce the "word" by which speakers could refer to the object represented by that name. For the Hebrews, language was always an *action*. To speak was to accomplish. And to name a thing was actually to affect the thing named: it finished its creation, as it were, in three distinct ways.

1. The thing which is, but is not named, cannot be known. If you can't talk about it, neither can you think about it or consider it or meditated upon it--nor, in consequence, can you know it at all! For the Hebrews, language is the stuff of knowing. Only when the created thing takes its place in language does it fully enter the realm of human awareness.

To name a thing, therefore, is to clothe it in visibility. To name a thing is make it knowable, to grant it place in the human conception of the world. It *seems* suddenly to appear, that which had in fact existed before its appearing.

(But this concept is not restricted to the Hebrews. Most primitive cultures took time and tremendous pains to discover the *true* name of a child in order to present that child truly to the world--and to itself!)

2. And that which is granted a name is thereby joined to the whole "grammar" of existence. As words are joined to words in the structure of a sentence, so any single thing named stands in a living and relational union--stands in a sweet kinship--with every other named thing in the universe. And as one word may enjoy an infinite variety of

grammatical relationships, sentence to sentence, speech to speech; as the *changings* of relationship indicate the healthy flow of its life, so the thing named (or the person named) may enjoy the development of countless relationships to the grand creation of God.

3. And finally, the name of a thing also contained the purpose and the value of that thing. It offered continually a *why*, a reason for this thing's participation in the fullness of creation. (Recall Jacob's new name, "Israel," and its effect on the man himself, changing his character, announcing his new purpose as a "Striver With God." "Israel" next became the name of a nation, God's chosen, holy nation: "A kingdom of priests to me," says the naming God in Exodus 19:6.) If the second effect of naming was to place it into the *space* of the world, this third effect places it into the time of the world, making it active, defining characteristic goals to be accomplished in the future. The named thing is an esteemed thing, for that it *serves* the whole.

And when God had created everything; and when the Lord God had assessed all things as "Good, very good"; and when humankind, in the image of the Creator, had been set as steward in the midst of all good things, then God granted unto us ... not the first and primal tongue, to create out of nothing, but rather the second significant tongue: to name! And in naming to accomplish all three of the above effects upon the things and the people named.

So Adam was invited to name the animals, bringing them fully into his own knowing, establishing relationships with them and for them, discovering and applying purpose to them: domesticating them.

But the highest thing the human could ever name was ... another human. And so Adam and Eve do in the naming come to "know" each other, weave complex relationships with each other, affirm purpose and worth one upon the other:

> Then the man said,
> "This at last is bone of my bones
> and flesh of my flesh;
> She shall be called ishshah [woman]
> because she was taken out of ish. [man]

The Hebrew words ishshah and ish make the same sort of pun that the English words *woman* and *man* do: one word acts as a root for the other, longer word; while the shorter word needs the longer one for fulfillment. Man and Wo-Man need each other: both the names, the bare words, and the objects named.

Now, then, the application of my paradigm:

It is precisely this sort of naming that the story is for the feelings of children. The whole story--its full experience from "Once upon a time" to "happily ever after"--becomes the name of some previously nameless and shapeless trouble truly encountered childrens lives, a scary thought or mood discovered even within themselves, the fear suffered at natural transitions, leaving home, going to school, finding a new baby in their houses, fearing abandonment by their parents....

The story helps children to know what otherwise would lurk in the unknowable regions of their dark souls, or of the dark world. (This is what the "robber" story accomplished for me, giving my personal encounters with evil in the abstract a local habitation and a name.)

The story establishes effective, useful, healthy relationships with things now given shape. (Remember the rules young Wally understood to exist between himself and the robber--as well as the important relationships he, as the eldest, experienced with his family.)

The story even gives the children purpose and value, valor and strength and goodness and worth. (Hard as the responsibility was, I could nonetheless act as the savior of my family: I, I kept them alive!)

Now, therefore, what should we not tell stories about? What should we, therefore, not name for the sake of the children? Should we skip departures temporal? Departures mortal? Should Maurice Sendak *not* have given a name and a shape to the

Wild Things of the child's perfervid imagination? And if he had not, what would that child have miss? Should *Branta and the Golden Stone* completely compromise this business of evil actions in beloved people (her father's selfish mis-use of the Golden Stone)? Should *Branta* ignore the dyings that make us sad--and also, then, the sacrifice of love that makes us glad and good again?

The stories that contain badness are not bad stories. Rather, they are among some of the best. Because the story-teller who loves the children and gives the whole of his or her self to them by means of the tale, inviting at the same time the whole of the children's selves, is of all people the best able to confront true and truly terrible things *with* the children. The story-teller takes their hands and companions them into the future framed within the story, into the future awaiting them outside the story.

The story-teller who can name otherwise amorphous fears, does at the same time name the children! Knows them. Helps them to know their selves. Gives *them* place in the whole wide world. Persuades them of their value and purpose and strength and goodness and glory. Each may be, you see, a little Israel, if only the name has once become their experience.

So I wrote *Branta and the Golden Stone* with the hope of causing in children a love for Branta herself, by which love to identify with her--to dwell within her.

Branta should carry both bad and good into the children's experience; should name bad as bad, and good as good, and every child as loving of many things and filled with remarkable powers.

Branta knows loneliness in the extreme. So do children.

She has seen dying, and she had encountered the consequences of sin and greed and pride. A hard life? Yes, but no harder than the nightmares and the apprehensions of little children. And also as hard as life shall surely yet be for them.

But this is fantasy. This is the way children already think. And children distinguish between the experience of "playing at" something and the experience that

forces itself upon them. They have control over fantasy! They can enter it just as far as they are prepared to experience it, and no farther. It is only as "real" as their hearts want to engage reality; otherwise, it's only a story. And the crossing of these boundaries is made possible and powerful when a loving, trusted adult journeys with them, an arm around them, telling the tale or else reading the tale together.

+ + +

Conclusion: Grasshoppers

Our son at six and seven Matthew dreamed horrible dreams. He would start from sleep, fly from his bedroom down the hall, then bullet it little body into our bed, eyes as wide as boiled eggs.

We could smell the fear on him, for it caused his sweat to sour.

"What, Matthew? What is it?" his mother would gently ask.

And he: "Grasshoppers!"

It was a recurring nightmare: grasshoppers lurked at the bottom of a hole in his pillow. Insects huger than himself. They bit, he said, "Sidways," and clacked when they did. They were waiting for the time he would fall down the shaft to their lair, where they would tear himself apart for supper.

Three choices presented themselves to us, his parents.

But I had too strong a memory of my own childhood to make my mother's choice. No one would say to our son, "Oh, Matthew, don't be silly. There are no grasshoppers anywhere near your pillow."

On the other hand, I was probably still enough of the child myself to make the second choice: in a sense, I believed him.

Well, I began to dream my own dream, in which Matthew and I are walking over

an endless field of grass, bright green, too extremely green to be safe. Matthew worms his hand out of mine and dashes ahead. "Wait!" I cry. "Matthew, wait!" I cry with a deep parental dread of the dangers ahead of him. And sure enough, all at once he vanishes from my sight. He has, I know, fallen into the hole of his dream. I rush forward. I find the hole. I see him falling--and I see, at the bottom, the grasshoppers of the Apocalypse waiting to eat him, and now I am in unspeakable anguish for my son. Should I jump after him? Should I return for help? I wake up.

My wife made the third choice, the still more excellent way.

One night, having calmed him down, Thanne took her son's hand and walked back to his bed. She sat beside him on the bed and asked for the details of those grasshoppers again. Matthew recounted them, whispering, terrified to mention them in their own hearing.

When he was done, Thanne said, "Is this the pillow?"--touching the one he slept with.

"Yesssss...."

"Ah," she said, nodding in solemn agreement. "But," she said, "Matthew, did you know that grasshoppers, they are finicky?"

"Nooooo..."

"Yes. Grasshoppers live in only one kind of pillow. This kind of pillow," she said, taking his from the bed. "Come with me," she said, and again she took his hand. She led him to a large garbage can in the kitchen, and there she stuffed the pillow good and gone forever.

Next, she got him a different sort of pillow, in which, she assured him, grasshoppers wouldn't be caught dead.

Too, taking advantage of the opportunity, she removed all the toys he took with him to bed.

You see? Thanne companioned him into his story. She accepted its premises, but

not its present ending. She assumed the role of the story-teller and thereby led her son through the terrible (and terribly true) terrain of the tale even unto a marvelous ending. Thanne uttered the whole of the name of the spirit that had come to wrestle my son night after night, to wrestle him in his solitude. So Matthew learned the night spirit's name as well. He took power over the demon.

And he never dreamed of grasshoppers again.