

# Two Doors

JEAN LITTLE

A child's book closes a door behind him,  
Putting him where no fears can find him,  
Setting aside until tomorrow  
His blackest sin, his weightiest sorrow.  
That done, it opens another door  
Inviting him to invade, explore  
A continent too few people find,  
The coasts, the cliffs of his private mind.  
When he approaches his destination,  
The land of his own imagination,  
Wonder-struck he will stand and see  
Magic, miracle, mystery.  
Dragons there spit fire and thunder.  
Princesses wait, imprisoned under  
Wicked spells - and every youth  
Is a youngest son and the soul of truth,  
Leaving the castle, poor and spurned,  
And galloping back with the tables turned.  
There Mary Poppins, never failing,  
Slides calmly up the bannister railing.  
Alice inhabits a rabbit's hole.  
The Borrowers forage. Rat and Mole  
Mess with boats. Bold Robin Hood  
Robs the rich to reward the good.  
The child who roams there comes to know  
Peter Pan and Pinocchio,  
Cinderella, Babar, Pooh  
And Dr. Seuss's fantastic crew.  
Readers meet Swallow and Amazon,  
The Ugly Duckling become a swan,  
Gulliver lost in a world too big  
And Wilbur cunningly dubbed "some pig".  
Diamond is there on North Wind's back,  
Anne Shirley wishing her hair were black,  
Julily fleeing from slavery  
To Canada and liberty,  
Hans Brinker skimming across the ice,  
Pippi Longstocking, Homer Price,  
Frog and Toad and Toby Tyler,  
Reepicheep and Mrs. Frankweiler.

I know I ought to end this list  
But, if I did, I would have missed  
Ramona the Pest and Johnny Tremain,  
The Treasure Seekers, those boys Mark Twain  
Wrote into life, Kim, Sara Crewe,  
Friends to be cherished a whole life through.

Through space, through time, a book can go.  
Southern children play in snow.  
Inland children ride the waves.  
Modern children dwell in caves,  
Slave in mills or catch the Plague.  
Affluent children have to beg.  
Kids whose sole pet is a fish  
Ride bareback any time they wish.  
Apartment children get to rouse  
At cock-crow and go milk the cows.  
Kids whose houses feel like cages  
Live awhile in orphanages,  
Turn acrobats and do back-flips  
Or stow away on clipper ships.  
The bookish child, by turns, can be  
Jewish, Hindu, Christian, Cree,  
Moslem, Mormon, Rosicrucian  
(Without resulting dissolution.)  
Around the globe this child may roam  
And find, in every country, home,  
Flying without jet lag or trauma  
From Heidi's Alm to Fujiyama  
(Or Narnia or Middle Earth.)  
Children change their date of birth,  
Swap sexes, try out other races,  
See in their mirrors strange new faces -  
Icelandic, Zambian, Japanese -  
And switch back to themselves with ease.  
(And once a child has lived within  
A different shade of thought or skin,  
Bigotry will make no sense  
Measured against experience.  
Foreigners do not seem odd  
To the heart that's been abroad.)  
Spare them lectures. Slides don't show.  
Give them books and let them go.

A child's book closes a door behind her,

Putting her where no fears can find her,  
And then it opens another door  
To wishing well and dinosaur.  
Baghdad, Moose Jaw, Babylon,  
Years not yet and years long gone,  
Spaceships and the Table Round  
On printed pages can be found.  
Laura Ingalls, Junior Brown,  
Fiver safe on Watership Down,  
Marco Polo, Scrooge, Jane Eyre  
And Harriet Welch are waiting there.

Oh listen, child who looks so lonely  
(Whether fifth or one-and-only,  
Child who's driving people crazy,  
Child everybody knows is lazy,  
Child who's frightened of the dark,  
Child as happy as a lark,  
Busy child or child who's bored,  
Child who's left books unexplored,  
Come and be bewitched, beguiled,  
For blessed is the reading child.

Taran, Mowgli, Beth and Jo  
Are people you will want to know.  
Emma painting the sky at night,  
Gilly spoiling to start a fight,  
The Young Ben, neither man nor boy,  
Kizzy Lovell, the diddakoi,  
The Middle Moffat, the brave few  
Who made up Bilbo Baggins' crew,  
Rosemary Sutcliff's Beric, Drem,  
Don't miss your chance of knowing them.  
(Kate Bloomfield should be on that list,  
As sure as I'm an egotist.)  
Here are friends for every mood,  
Some to fight off lassitude,  
Some to sail the seven seas,  
Some to share love's mysteries.

If you're a child who haunts pet stores,  
Open a book and these are yours:  
Flicka whinnying when you call,  
Rascal, Sounder, Bambi. All -  
The Yearling, Lassie, Beautiful Joe,

The Snow Goose circling, dipping low,  
Greyfriars Bobby, Silver Chief –  
Will break and bless your heart with grief.

May poetry sound in your ear  
As soon as you begin to hear,  
From Jack and Jill sent after water  
To poor Lord Ullin's drowning daughter,  
From rhymes that sing a child to sleep  
To lines which make you want to weep  
For Browning's Duchess and the loss  
Of him who shot the albatross.  
And may you drink, before you droop,  
A bowl of alligator soup.

Soon you'll grow and then you'll be  
Made to read Sociology,  
Tricked into seeking satisfaction  
From books that boast of "gut reaction",  
Books that hoax and books that hex,  
How-to-do-it books on sex,  
Books where cheaters never flunk,  
Whose heroes are myths to debunk,  
Where cynicism reigns supreme,  
Where nobody would ever dream  
Of putting in some loving laughter  
Or ending "happy ever after".  
Hurry, child, before they get you.  
Delight in reading while they let you.  
Acquire that lost-in-a-vision look,  
Child with a blessing, child with a book.  
Led by a story, come, explore.  
Shut fast behind you the first door.  
Set wide the second and walk through  
To all the worlds which wait for you.

Jean Little's books have won international recognition. Her recent novel, *Listen for the Singing*, has been translated by Paule Daveluy as *Ecoute, l'oiseau chantera*, and published in the *Collection des deux solitudes – jeunesse* series. It has also been reissued this year in English, in a new paperback edition.