

Linda

With hair disheveled, breathless, panting,
Ran Linda Arabella home.
Her father sighed and started ranting:
"Oh, Goldilocks, why do you roam?
"What scrape has sent you homeward fleeing?
"I worry so for your wellbeing."
Oh how that pet name made her wince!
She liked it not – not ever since
She'd left off daily wearing dresses;
For since she'd come into her teens
The thing to wear was denim jeans;
And gone were all her childhood tresses.
"Oh pa!" she said, "Can you not see
"I'm not the babe I used to be?"

She told him of the woodland dwelling,
The porridge and the broken chair.
How tiredness seized her; 'twas compelling;
It made her want to climb the stair
And find the bedroom where she rested.
The Bears returned. How they protested
At finding her asleep in bed!
She screamed, through window leapt and fled.
"Enough!" her father groaned, "you're letting
"That curiosity of yours
"Beguile and take you where it lures.
"I fear just like your ma you're getting."
Her ma had died when she was small;
She scarcely could her ma recall.

Whenever Linda asked her father
About her ma, and why she'd died,
All he would say was "She was rather
"Peculiar, fairly odd," and sighed.
"Yes, fairly odd, you know," he'd murmur,
Then say no more – say nothing firmer.
So Linda laughed and said: "Dear Pa,
"So like my fairly odd mamma
"I'm growing." "Stop!" her father shouted.
"Don't mock! You know not what you say.
"You'll go the way she went one day,
"For sadly that cannot be doubted
"Unless I find a ma for you.
"A proper ma's long overdue."

And so it was a few weeks later
Her father told her he would wed.
"I'll have a wife and you a mater.
"A widow's she and thoroughbred,
"For she's with royalty connected
"And really's very well respected.
"Her daughters are a charming pair;
"You'll sisters have. I do declare,
"Oh Goldilocks, what could be neater?
"And Lady Grimstock will have tea
"With us today; and you will see
"Her daughters with her when you greet her.
"And please, my dear, put on a dress –
"Array yourself with all finesse."

That afternoon she met the Grimstocks.
"The daughters are an ugly pair,"
She thought "With plucked eyebrows and prim locks,
"They're more like painted dolls, I swear."
"Ah, Lady Grimstock," pa said, "Greetings!
"May fortune favour all our meetings!
"Meet Linda Arabella; she
"Will be your daughter number three!"
"Aw, Linda Arabella's far too
"Unwieldy," daughter number one
Complained; and not to be outdone
Her sister said "It's so bizarre too.
"But Lindarella – that's real nice."
Her sis agreed 'twas more concise.

"Oh, Harrikins," the widow tittered,
"How charming are the girls all three!"
"Oh, ducky dear," her father twittered
"A happy fam'ly we shall be!"
"Ugh, 'Harrikins' – it's all too yucky,"
Poor Linda thought. "And as for 'ducky'
"That really does stick in my throat;
"And Lindarella gets my goat!"
The talk through tea was sweet politeness
Yet Linda felt it was not right.
"There's something wrong," she thought, "despite
"The smiles and laughs and seeming brightness."
That night as she lay on her bed
She felt uneasy, full of dread.

Then Linda sensed there was another
 Within her room; she gasped. "Don't fear!"
The figure said, "Tis I, your mother.
 "Your fairly odd mamma is here."
"So ma," said Linda, "you're still living!"
"No, no," said ma, "have no misgiving;
 "I died, for curiosity
 "Has killed not only cats but me.
"But that's another story. Rather
 "Tis you that most concerns me now.
 "Your pa's so dim, I do avow,
"He never chooses well." "But father,"
 Protested Linda, "once chose you."
 "Oh no," said ma, "not so – not true."

"So you," said Linda, "you chose Harry!"
 "I may be fairly odd," said ma,
"But not that odd. One has to marry
 "The toad one's kissed; I got your pa
"And not a prince. 'Twas my own folly.
"But learn from me, for life's not jolly
 "When married to a former toad
 "If he's the wrong 'un." "Well, I'm blowed!"
Exclaimed young Linda, "I'm not kissing
 "Transmutant toads – the risk's too great.
 "I'll bide my time – await my fate."
"Quite right," said ma. "But come, we're missing
 "The reason for my being here.
 "Your mind is troubled, that is clear."

"Those Grimstock sisters make me queasy;
 "That Lindarella name's so weird,"
Young Linda said. "I feel uneasy."
 And ma replied "Tis as you feared.
"The Grimstock ma and sisters frightful
"Will, Linda dear, to you be spiteful.
 "That Lindarella name won't last;
 "Twill slightly change and be recast
"To something even less appealing."
 "But pa," cried Linda, "must be told
 "His precious bride's a heartless scold!"
"Too late," ma said. "The pair are sealing
 "The fated doom they've both deserved.
 "But courage, girl, don't be unnerved!"

“But why have each deserved the other?”
Young Linda asked. “Your father's wealth
“Attracts the widow,” said her mother.
“Her spouse, who died of ruined health,
“On drink had all her money squandered.
“For ages now your pa has pondered
“On ways of gaining royal links;
“He's got one now, or so he thinks.
“But come, my girl, 'tis no use pining.
“For though you'll live beneath a cloud
“With sisters vulgar, vile and loud,
“A cloud must have a silver lining.
“Endure the follies of your pa,
“And trust your fairly odd mamma.”

“A silver lining?” Linda queried.
“What do you mean? I am perplexed.”
“When I'd miskissed that toad and wearied
“Of happiness and was much vexed,
“I found,” ma said, “my silver lining
“When you were born. Your pa's designing
“To link himself with royalty
“Will one day open, wait and see,
“A path for you to life more charming.”
“Yet pa's,” said Linda, “doomed to wed
“The Grimstock widow, so you've said.
“The Grimstock sisters are alarming.
“The future's very grim with pa.”
“Yes, three times grim,” observed her ma.

“Oh mother, that is most provoking”
Poor Linda cried. “It won't be fun!”
“I'm sorry, dear,” said ma, “for joking.
“I never could resist a pun.
“But come, 'tis time. I must be leaving.”
“Oh mother stay!” cried Linda grieving.
“Please don't abandon me with pa;
“I need my fairly odd mamma!”
“I'll not,” said ma, “leave you unaided.
“Take heed, my girl, as I depart,
“Three things I urge you take to heart.”
Then Linda heard before ma faded:
“Be kind to mice; accept your lot.
“And duly tend the pumpkin plot.”