

# Picnics in the Wood

## and other Bed Time Stories



Written and Illustrated  
by Aaron Brachfeld and Mary Choate



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Aaron Brachfeld and Mary Choate

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*This book's stories were written in dedication  
to Mary, with love:*

*Here are stories to read,  
pictures to regard and smile at,  
and drawings to watch for hours*

*for when you can't sleep,  
for when you can sleep,  
for when you don't want to sleep,  
and for when you shouldn't sleep.*





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# A Note to Those Who Would Read this Book Aloud to Others

In the spring, geese take flight to the songs of plows turning the earth and children playing in the fields, leaving behind them the warm places they found refuge at for the winter. And, in autumn when the trees kindle their leaves against the growing cold of the waning summer and the children come outside to play less often, the geese remember the old joyful songs of spring and return from their summer homes in the north. In the winter, many of these geese make their way to the banks of creeks and rivers, and more than a few of them go to the ponds. They come to wherever they may

stay until the weather grows warmer and they can, once again, return home.

The geese are to be loved when they leave and when they return; the coming and going of the geese are as delightful to the dreaming mind as the coming and going of the seasons.

The geese travel as much as the stars do. But, unlike the geese, not all the stars are welcome: not all journeys change us for the better and not all our footfalls lead us to pleasant valleys. Who doubts my words? Even the youngest child knows that to even the most blissful dreamer there comes from time to time a restless night. Who does not dread those dark paths that guide special travelers to a place where those travelers will be as unwelcome as a star of ill omen?

No, it is nonsense to deny that from time to time we all have dreams that scare us and we are sometimes led to places we do not

wish to be. Sometimes all our thoughts—like those of geese—are of home.

When beautiful evenings are clouded by thunder, when the world's many waters do not rest in their whisperings and the ground itself spins wildly through a void, we do not sleep until the work our dark path has given to us is done.

In those times when the wind sings secret songs to us, we find ourselves willing to rush to *our* end if it would bring an end to the tasks required of us. In those times, courage is easy to find, even if a good path is not... and it is in those times we most dearly need to hear a story.

A story allows a person to imagine things as they could be and enables even the feeblest imagination to conceive of brave notions; when we read stories before going to sleep, we encourage ourselves to have greater dreams, to do what is good and right, to do what we require of ourselves. This is why

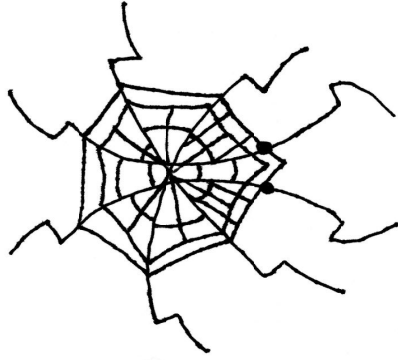
bed time stories are so important for children—and for the adults who read to them: those children grow up to become the adults who remember being read to.

Stories empower us to accomplish our will and guide our heart when we otherwise could not. It is through such education that we overcome the fear and constraints of mortality; it is through such education that nobility is forged. Education allows us to govern not only our own heart and will, but to strengthen the hearts and wills of other people too. This is why our children—who are not yet strong adults or mighty elders—ask their parents for stories; this is why learned people everywhere are expected to tell their stories and to share their knowledge: so that all who hear them might become better people. Indeed this is how, for millennia, justice has been learned and civilization preserved throughout all lands.

Yes, great goodness was once and still is  
achieved by quiet words spoken after dinner  
or before bed, or during the afternoon  
nap...and it is this noble goodness that in  
writing these words I hope to help you to tell  
now.



# The Cactus And The Spider



Once there was a prickly pear cactus that had no friends. The Cactus had no friends not for any fault of its own, but only because it lived in the desert and not many other things did.

It had always lived on its own. It was once originally a part of a larger cactus, but had been torn from its parent (as its parent had been torn from its parent, and so on back to the first cactus in that line to have grown from a seed). Where it landed on the ground after being torn, it set down roots and became a new cactus.

Cactuses generally don't mind living alone, but certainly don't mind company, either. After the Cactus had lived alone a long time and had grown quite large, a spider made its home in the Cactus's shade. "Do you mind if I live here?" asked the Spider.

"Not at all," said the Cactus "if you'll be my friend." And so the Cactus and the Spider grew to be good friends.

One day it rained so hard the Spider and its web were washed clean off the Cactus. “Help!” cried the Spider as it tried to stay afloat. Well, there was only one thing for the Cactus to do: the Cactus got up out of the ground and swam after its Spider.

Trying to find its friend in the flood was difficult enough, but the rain and thunder and the debris in the waters were so confounding that the Cactus lost track of the Spider in the commotion. The next day, the rain stopped and the sun came out. The Cactus looked everywhere for the Spider, but there was no trace of it and because of this the Cactus was very sad.

The Cactus wandered about the desert until it found a crow—or rather, the Crow found the Cactus. The Crow was so surprised to see a cactus moving about like an animal that it had to know what made the plant take up its roots and go wandering the desert, and where the plant was going, and

why it was going there. So the Crow flew down and walked beside the Cactus, and introduced herself, and told the Cactus how she had lived in the desert her whole life and never seen a plant walk about. The Cactus told the Crow that it had lived in the desert its whole life and never been talked to by a bird.

Soon enough, the two were acting like old friends who were meeting for the first time after a long absence, eagerly telling each other about all the interesting things they'd done and seen. The Crow told the Cactus about what it was like to be a bird, and about her parents and friends. And then the Cactus told the crow about how it had once been part of a larger plant, and how it lived in the same place all alone for its whole life until a spider came and became its friend.

When the Cactus told the Crow about the rainstorm, and how it could never rest until it found its friend, the Crow understood why the Cactus was wandering about, and why the

plant had taken up its roots. How could the Crow waste even a moment after learning about the Spider? She told the Cactus right away, “Cactus, don’t worry. I’m your friend too and I want to help you find your Spider. I’m very good at finding things, and I have many friends who are even better at finding things than I am. Let me ask around to see if anyone has seen your spider. At the end of a week I’ll find you—wherever you may be—and tell you what I’ve learned.” The Cactus was very happy that it had a friend like the Crow.

At the end of a week, the Crow came to where the Cactus had wandered and carried with it a rattlesnake. “Cactus, I want you to meet one of my friends; she wants to be your friend too!” explained the Crow. “She has news about your spider, and after learning your story, she wanted to tell you herself.” The Cactus was so happy at this that it danced.

After the Cactus had settled down a bit, the Snake talked to the Cactus and the Crow, explaining that she saw the Spider traveling north of her den a few weeks past. The spider, though lost, seemed healthy and well, and was trying to get back home.

Too anxious to hear more than what was only essential to the chase, the Cactus thanked the Snake right then and asked the Crow if they might go and follow the Spider from where the Snake last saw it. The Crow agreed that was a good idea and carried the snake in one claw back to her den and carried the Cactus in the other claw to where the Snake told them she saw the Spider last.

Traveling north, they soon came to a rabbit. The Rabbit had not seen the Spider, but knew someone who had—

But why should I make a longer story of it?

The crow and the Cactus traveled the desert, meeting all sorts of new friends,

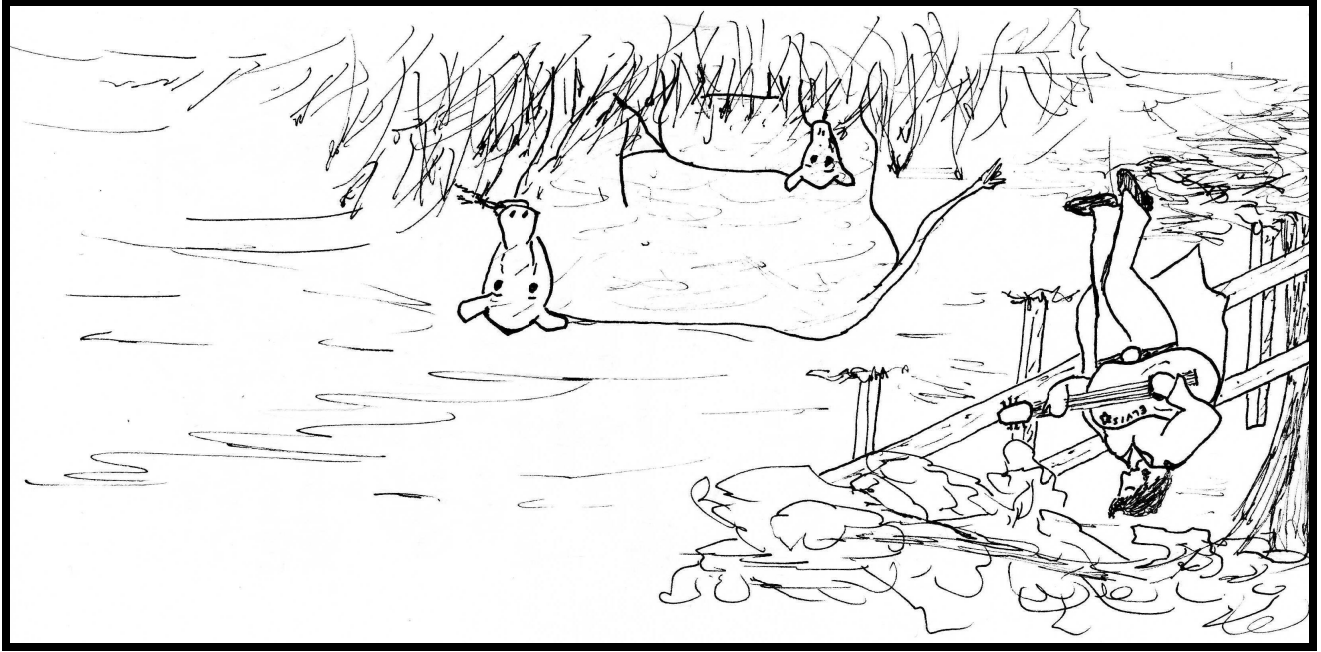
discovering strange new places...even seeing the ocean, where the flood-river met the beach. One day they found themselves near to where the Crow first saw the Cactus, traveling in the direction that the sagebrush saw the Spider walking.

The Crow was the first to see the Spider, and happily pointed the arachnid out to the Cactus. "There's your Spider!" The Cactus was so happy to see the Spider again that when the Cactus walked up to the Spider, the two embraced—which is a difficult thing to do with a Cactus (or a Spider, for that matter).

The Cactus set down root again right there, and the two lived together happily thereafter, hearing often from the many friends they now had.

Isn't it true that we so often have more friends than we know?





# The Small Dragon That Lived in The Library



In a library that was big and very comfortable there lived a small dragon between the studs of the wall separating the Head Librarian's office and the Book Depository. He could change his color to match his surroundings like a chameleon, or to make on his skin pretty patterns that matched no surroundings at all. His favorite color to be was purple, though he was also partial to red plaid.

At night, after all the people had left the library, the Dragon would come out of its nest that it had built between the walls of the Head Librarian's office and the Book Depository and look at all the books that people had read and returned, or returned without reading at all. The Dragon sometimes liked to think that he could tell which ones had been read and which ones hadn't, but even though he knew that he couldn't actually know, he still spent many wonderful hours guessing and imagining.

After he had guessed which ones had been read and which ones hadn't, he tried to think of why some had been checked out and never read. Sometimes he would agree that those books weren't worth the time of reading, but other times he had to disagree.

Later in the night, he would fly to the second, third and basement floors to find his favorite books and books he had never read before. After getting at least a dozen, he'd bring them back to the Depository to read until dawn rose and the Librarians returned.

The Librarians always wondered how books that never were checked out kept ending up in the Depository, and though they tried to think of how, they never imagined that a small dragon living between the walls had read them the night before. Can you imagine the confusion of those Librarians when books would mysteriously disappear and then reappear months or years later in the Depository, after the Dragon had enjoyed

reading them slowly in his nest? The small dragon loved to watch their confusion: all Dragons are naturally very mischievous.

On days when the library was closed, the Dragon would lounge in the soft chairs by the sunny windows of the top floor and read until he fell asleep in a nap. It was on such a day that the Dragon had taken his favorite books with him to read that he woke up from his nap looking straight in the eye of a giant man. The man wasn't actually extraordinarily large, but to such a small dragon who had only seen people through a small crack between the walls, this man seemed huge!

At first, the dragon was scared, but when he thought about it, he realized that if the Man had meant him any harm, the Man could have harmed him while he was asleep without fear. After a few awkward moments, the Man apologized for startling the Dragon. He had not intended to be rude, but had been passing through when he became

captivated by the Dragon's beautiful purple color, and stopped to stare.

At such politeness and flattery the Dragon remembered his manners and, after first assuring the Man that he bore no hard feelings, the Dragon asked the Man to forgive him for forgetting his manners upon meeting a stranger. He then offered the Man some hot chocolate. "I found a bunch of packets of powdered hot chocolate mix in the Librarians' Lounge upstairs, and since then I have been saving them for a special occasion. And since you're the first visitor I have ever had the chance to welcome since I came to this library, I'd like to share them with you: what is a more special occasion than meeting a new friend?" How could the Man not smile and feel welcomed by such hospitality? The Dragon smiled back, and collected his books and led the man downstairs to the Depository.

After putting the books in the Depository and giggling a bit to himself about the mischief he just caused by putting books that had not been yet checked out into the Depository, he hurried into his wall to get the hot chocolate. “What about cups?” asked the Man.

The Dragon laughed. “Don’t worry! I’ll be right back.” The small Dragon flew into the Head Librarian’s office and borrowed two coffee cups, filled them with water from the Librarian’s Lounge, and carefully flew them back. “Watch this,” said the Dragon to the Man. In an instant, the small Dragon blew fire from his small mouth to the mugs (being very careful not to scorch the coffee cups—after all, they weren’t his and he didn’t want to damage them!) and brought the water to a boil.

Quick as anything, in went the powdered hot chocolate mix and soon the two were drinking and sharing jokes. Hours passed,

and the Dragon told the Man all about living in the Library, and the fun mischief he was up to, and the wonderful books he had read. He even entertained the Man for a full hour by changing colors. The two were having such fun that they raided the Head Librarian's office for cookies four times before the Dragon realized he never asked the Man's name!

The Dragon explained that he knew it was rude to ask a guest's name, and that politeness had prevented him from asking, but that now that the two were good friends, there was no rudeness to asking the Man to introduce himself—especially now that the Man knew nearly all about the Dragon! The Man agreed, saying “Don't worry! I understand. I was trying to be polite too by not asking your name: you see, by the end of next week, I'll be the new Head Librarian here, and that makes you my guest!”

The Dragon must have looked uncomfortable, because the Man was quick to laugh and put him at ease. “Don’t worry! Your mischief didn’t in any way contribute to the previous Head Librarian retiring: she has worked a long time and our mutual employer is rewarding her with a paid retirement.” And then the Man went on explaining how there are many libraries, and how he was being promoted from another to take over as Head Librarian at this one. “I had just dropped by today to look at the library entrusted to me to learn its secrets and its treasures when I found you napping in the sunshine upstairs.”

As the Dragon and the Man continued to talk, the Man told the Dragon that he was perfectly welcome to stay. In fact, if the Dragon wanted something more comfortable than the space between studs in the wall for a nest, he could name it and the new Head Librarian would get it for him! After further

discussion on the subject, the two agreed to expand the secret space between the Head Librarian's office and the Book Depository so it would be large enough for some pillows. Also, to the great pleasure of the Dragon, the new Head Librarian was even so thoughtful to make available all the hot chocolate the Dragon could drink...so long as the Dragon would share a cup or two with the Man every once in a while, of course. And before the afternoon passed, the new Head Librarian even explained how Librarians can order books from other libraries, and offered that if the Dragon ever ran out of things to read, he could always ask for some new books.

Soon it was becoming time for dinner, and the Man told the Dragon that he was in for a treat: the Dragon had never ate a pizza before, and the Man would order one for delivery they could share! Over pizza, root beer and milk, the Man shared his library stories with the Dragon, as the Dragon had

shared his with the Man; and told the Dragon of the mischief he had done over the years.

You can see how the two became even better friends after that!

After that night, the Dragon kept at his old tricks and even—with the help of the new Head Librarian—came up with some new tricks to play on the Librarians which the Head Librarian and the Dragon would laugh at later in the night, after the library had closed, over cups of hot chocolate and empty pizza boxes.



Feeding	he
Ducks	inside



One day it was terribly cold out, and no one could go outdoors and play—even if they wanted to and had the time. It was a day good for hot chocolate, and porridge, and sweaters and jackets; for soft blankets and soft couches. But even though a little girl had all these things, she still wished to go outside. Why? Because to feed the ducks, she had to be outside!

She *loved* to feed the ducks. Every day she'd go with a bag of crusts and other bread and crackers she could find, and sit by the pond in the park, and delight in feeding all the ducks. There would be big ducks, and small ducks, fuzzy baby ducks, mallards with their magnificent colors, the lady ducks with their intricate beautiful brown feathers, black ducks, white ducks, and even quite a few geese, crows and seagulls too. And they all loved the bread! She knew and was friends with nearly all the birds in the park, and to

consider going a day without seeing them was difficult for her to do.

So she got on her coat and gloves, her hat, her sweater, long underwear, and all sorts of other clothing to keep her warm against the cold. But as she walked outside, she realized that she was still too cold to go and feed the ducks. So she went back inside, and put on even more clothing. She put on a sweat jacket, sweat pants; she doubled her socks, and put liners under her gloves. She stepped out again...still too cold! So she hurried back in, and put on even more: earmuffs and galoshes, snow pants and scarves. But she was still too cold.

She thought about how she couldn't go out and feed the ducks and grew quite sad. Maybe if she could only be a little tougher? She tried to go outside one more time, but realized that she just couldn't do it. She was about to feel very bad and give up when an idea came to her!

She went to the window and opened it up and yelled as loud as she could: "Ducks! Ducks! Come over to my home, and I'll feed you hot bread, hot chocolate and let you warm up by the fire!" She wasn't sure if the ducks could hear her all the way by the lake, but a squirrel who heard her yell came over right away. "I bet that they can't hear you from here. If you'll invite me too, I'll be glad to tell them!"

She realized how rude it was of her not to have invited all the animals! After all, it was very cold out, and though they were used to it and could stand it a lot better than she, sometimes everyone just needs to be invited in to warm up. So she agreed, and even told the squirrel that if he had friends, he could bring them over too.

Soon enough, all the birds and the squirrels, and the small and large animals were walking and flying up to her door. It was becoming clear very quickly that she

couldn't have room for all of them. What was she going to do? As quickly as she could, she got on the phone and called her neighbor. Her neighbor knew lots of things and was very smart. She told her neighbor about the situation, but before she could finish, her neighbor said, "don't worry! I've figured it out! In fact, I don't know how I didn't think of it before! Ducks and geese, and other birds, and squirrels and all sorts of wonderful animals in the house! That's great! I wouldn't mind at all if some of them came to my house, too." Now her neighbor could feed ducks in the warmth of her home too!

But there were still too many animals. She and her neighbor called up other neighbors, and all through the afternoon more and more neighbors kept opening their homes to the animals. Everyone was having a great time.

When the last person in town had opened their home to the animals, everyone felt glad that all the animals would be accommodated. All through the day the animals sat around the houses of the town, happy and wonderfully warm, reading the newspaper comics section and talking over hot chocolate, enjoying tasty bread. At night, when it got really cold, nobody made their animals leave, but instead let them spend the night—after watching really fun movies and eating dinner with them.

The animals were such great company that they stayed with the people all through the winter. And now every year in the cold months, nobody has to go out to feed the ducks!



While Richard  
Napped



Richard's house always had a green lawn between spring and fall, and the grass was cool in the summertime. Tall poplars had grown in his backyard even before his home had been built, and much of his childhood was spent reading under books about great adventures their shade.

That fourth of September was warm, but a hint of the chill of the coming winter could be felt on the air. Beneath the poplars, the clover was tall and kept the ground cool and the air fresh. A warm breeze could be felt coming from the mountains far away, but Richard was very comfortable in his sweatshirt.

Richard's head was against the poplar closest to his house, and he lay between two of the great roots while reading his favorite book. Richard was comfortable and at peace with the world he was only just old enough to enter upon as an adult. He was beginning to

nap, dreaming many things he would not remember when he would wake up.

His dog, which had been named Lucky, lay beside him in the warm sunshine. Inside the house, his Aunt Linda and Uncle Martin were reading the newspaper over a lunch of honeyed apples and tuna sandwiches; his younger cousins played upstairs with his mother. His mother, whom everyone else beside Richard called Jane, was at that moment planning to join his Aunt and Uncle for lunch in the kitchen. Across the street in the house of his Aunt and Uncle, Richard's father—whom even Richard called Stephan—played chess with Stephan's cousin Ben. Ben was winning as usual.

As Richard began to dream, Linda considered between comic strips inviting Richard in for sandwiches and apples, but her thoughts were interrupted by her husband pointing vigorously at the newspaper he was reading, shaking the page at her.

“Look at this!” said Martin to his wife. “It says in the newspaper that our government is buying up all the uranium so that nobody else can bomb us with it. It says that we’re going to destroy it all once we have it!” Martin waved the paper for his wife to see and appreciate.

But Linda didn’t look up from where she sat across from Martin at her sister’s table. Instead, she continued sipping her tea and reading the Sunday comics. After a long while, she slowly and quietly said, without taking her eyes of the colorful pages, “it sounds nice, but I don’t think they’ll actually get all the uranium. They’ll always be more. And there’ll always be nasty weapons of some sort to kill us by, even if there’s no uranium.” And then Aunt Linda laughed.

“What are you laughing at?”

“Why, the comics, of course!” she said with the smile that had charmed her husband the first time they met.

Beyond the kitchen walls there were windows open in other places of the house, and through those open windows came to the kitchen the sound of children laughing, laughing and coming closer. Much closer. The sound of children giggling and running down stairs became the focus of all attention while the tiny feet ran closer and closer until at last the daughter of Martin and Linda—Richard’s cousin—came skipping into the kitchen with her brother (also Richard’s cousin) in tow and their Aunt Jane trying to keep up.

“Henry and I are going to the park and will bring the dog,” Richard’s cousin informed her parents. Martin and Linda were glad their two children were enjoying an afternoon in the sunshine, and the dog did need a walk. “Have fun!” they instructed their children. Instantly after this command, there was the joyful rushing sound of the dog’s paws on the linoleum and the leash

being put on. They heard laughter in the hallways of their home, laughter streaming out of their home's windows to the street; they heard their children filling the whole world with joy.

But soon the laughter grew softer and softer until only the birds were heard, singing their hymns to a moribund sun's love.

"Yeah...I suppose you're right," he said.

"About what, dear?"

"There being more uranium, and if not uranium, then plutonium, or biologicals or chemicals or (why not?), just old-fashioned guns or swords, or...or...even stones! We're going to kill ourselves one day. Some things are inevitable, aren't they? When we steal metals and things from the Earth, raping the land, only evil will come of it. Can you imagine—"

"Dear?"

"What?"

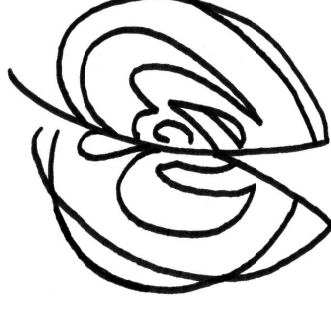
“Dear, I don’t want to talk about it. I’m sorry, but I don’t. It’s easier for me not to think about it. There’s nothing you or I can do about it, and there’s no sense in worrying because there’s nothing to be done or that should be done about it. Everything works out for the best always, whether we want it to or not, whether we think about it or not.”

There was silence for a while as Jane made herself a sandwich. Linda finished her tea, brought her cup to the sink and washed it, kissed her husband’s forehead and sat down to finish the comics as Jane sat down with a sandwich. Now robins joined the chorus in the yard, singing their sweet songs of spring, irreverent to the coming winter.

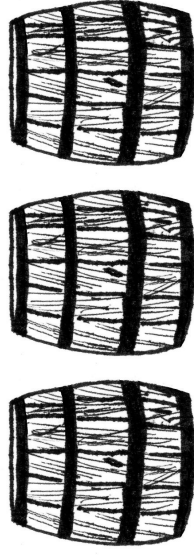
Martin put down his newspaper, looked briefly at an advertisement for mattresses, drank his tea and asked his wife for the comics she’d already read. And he read the comics. And Martin laughed when Jane told a joke. And a mile away, something

unspeakably terrible was being done; and on the other side of the world, a truly good and wonderful thing was happening—even while Jane ate her sandwich and Richard slept on the soft grass in the shade with his dog Lucky, feeling the warm breeze, dreaming things he wouldn't be able to remember a few minutes after he would wake up.

Linda was right.



# Delivering Goat Cheese by Boat



There is a town in which there are many beautiful trees and parks, with libraries where the Head Librarians work late every chance they get (much to the admiration of the pizza delivery drivers who frequently are called upon by them), and where it is warm enough all year long in the evening to play outside even after the sun has been set for hours.

Through that town runs a small river which is filled with trout and salmon, and is lined by rolling hills of oak and beach forests where the meadowlarks and robins and thousands of other birds live and sing. This small river can be navigated by small boats, and often is—except in bad weather. Then people must use the twisting roads.

But when the weather is nice, the whole of the town can be seen on the water; some reading the daily paper, others reading a nice book...some people fishing, or talking, or picnicking, or doing whatever they loved to do most on a river during a nice day. All the

restaurants along the river were built with this in mind, and had nice piers for navies of river boats that would crowd the river when the weather was pleasant enough to convince all who could to take to the river for the afternoon.

Yet even with all these people on the river, almost nobody ever saw the tiny house built on top of the big hill that overlooked the town and the river, and of those who saw it, almost nobody paid it any thought at all.

It was a small house because the owner didn't want a larger one: it had a spacious kitchen, two bedrooms (one for any guest that might come, but since no guests ever came, it was transformed into a study that doubled as a reading room), and a living room that also functioned as a foyer and a closet. Its owner was now about thirty-five years old, and for twenty-nine of those years had been named Mourette (her parents had a hard time choosing a name for her).

For the last fifteen of her years since she bought the house and land, she contented herself with singing to the birds (who were always kind enough to sing back to her), raising dairy goats on the open spaces of the forests she owned, baking whole wheat bread and goat cheese pizzas, talking occasionally with her neighbors to the east and south (who raised bees for honey and fresh herbs, respectively) about the possibility of co-branding a honey and herb flavored goat cheese, and generally keeping herself about and busy.

Every once in a while she would go down to the town. Sometimes she would go for pleasure, but most often on business to deliver goat milk and goat cheese to the restaurants there, or to the post office to ship her goods to customers too far for her to deliver to personally. Mourette had, since she began living at her house, used a boat to get to town: the same small river that went

through town passed through her property. Her boat resembled a large canoe, but had a sail she could unfurl when the wind was going her way. It was bright red with yellow and purple flames painted on the front, racing stripes on the sides and very fun to show off when she'd go to town. But there were days that the river was unsafe to boat, and so early on she bought a horse and small cart.

Her first horse—a highland pony—pulled the cart without fail, never giving her a reason to worry. But, no animal lives forever and there came a day when she needed to get a second horse.

When she bought her second horse, she intended her horse to help her herd goats and deliver her cheese and milk as its predecessor did. Her second horse was a beautiful red Hunter, on which she painted yellow and purple flames and racing stripes to make the horse even more fun to show off when she'd go to town on deliveries.

The horse loved the flames, and thought that the racing stripes *did* actually make him go faster. This caused the horse to simultaneously want to walk faster (because the stripes and the flames made him go faster), and walk slower (because he wanted to show off the stripes and flames that were making him go faster). The horse, over several years of frustration at being unable to decide which he preferred, eventually hit upon a brilliant solution: he could compromise by walking fast with his left legs and slow with his right legs. This, of course, caused him to spin in circles, become nauseous and fall down—a slight inconvenience that the horse (unlike his owner) was willing and glad to put up with.

No, his owner was not pleased with her horse's ingenious discovery. Such a terrible ride into town made it impossible for her to use her horse to deliver her cheese and milk. So she set her whole mind to the problem.

Mourette thought for a long time and decided that the only possible explanation for the horse's behavior had to be that the horse wanted to go fast and slow simultaneously, and that he wanted his left side to go fast and his right side to go slow. He didn't do this when herding goats, so it had to be the racing stripes and flames.

To try to even things out, she tried painting more racing stripes and flames on his right side. This initially led to some success, but soon the horse was confused again, and couldn't decide which side he wanted to show off more: the one with the more paint, or the one that had more of his beautiful coat unpainted. So, alternately, he would spin counterclockwise and clockwise. While this new motion was very good for making Mourette's milk unhomogenized over the course of her trip into town, it was quite bad for Mourette's customers who had ordered milk.

Mourette was frustrated, but far from giving up. She purchased a new larger cart, one that would allow less freedom to her horse's pirouettes. But such a cart also prohibited her horse from making the tight turns around the hills and had to be abandoned.

She tried painting only one side, but this caused the horse to hop on the two legs of the side painted. She tried painting him all over, but this caused him to bounce from hopping on all four feet. She tried painting his back and his stomach, but this made him try to walk on his hind legs and forelegs alternately and, while this movement did not disturb the milk, the ghastly game of leaping through the hills on the way to town did disturb Mourette and had to be abandoned. When she tried painting no sides at all, but the horse felt so offended that he was not beautified that, though he rode straight, he

was such a pain to handle that this solution had to be rejected too.

Mourette felt great sympathy for the animal, and never gave up on the beast. Tirelessly, she kept thinking of new ways that she might be able to coax her horse into pulling the cart in a safe way. But, until the horse was safe, she couldn't use him. People told her to buy another horse until she trained her first one—the river, when dangerous, was an unnecessary risk! One day, they warned, she would regret not simply having gotten another horse.

But Mourette, after purchasing a horse to help her deliver her cheese and milk to town and to help her herd goats never used her horse to take anything into town. She continued to use her boat even in dangerous weather, allowing her horse to enjoy lying in his pasture listening to the birds singing (and occasionally nibbling on some of the green

tall grass there) instead of helping her down the hilly roads.

On one particularly dangerous day it was so foggy that she couldn't see more than an arm's length away. She was to deliver cheese that day not because she had to, but because she liked to have the reputation for delivering one day earlier than demanded. And while it was probably not too smart to boat in that weather, the alternative of using her horse seemed to her even less smart. So she cursed her horse (still sleeping in its barn), braved the fog, packed her cheese in ice, loaded her cheese onto her boat in barrels, and set out for town.

The fog was so thick that she began to doubt whether she would be able to see the restaurant that had bought her cheese. Then it got thicker and she began to doubt whether she'd find the pier itself if she ever could find the restaurant. Then the fog got even thicker so that she couldn't even be sure if she'd be

able to see the town. This last doubt caused her some distress because she had been on the boat long enough that she knew she should have seen the town by then. After another hour, there was no more doubt: she missed the town entirely.

She realized how stupid it was to have tried to deliver in the fog, and so began to steer her boat towards the banks to wait out the weather before she did anything more stupid. Unfortunately she was unfamiliar with the part of the river that flowed beyond the town, and by the time she saw the jagged rocks along the banks it was almost too late to save her boat.

Her heart skipped a beat when she saw the imminent danger and imagined her boat smashed to splinters. As quickly as she could, she reached for an oar and thrust it upon the closest rock in an attempt to avoid destroying her boat. She heaved with all her strength and while her strength proved to be

just enough to put her boat safely away from the rocks of the banks, it was also just enough to guide her hapless boat towards a rather large boulder in the middle of the river.

You must understand that while the boulder was clearly visible even in the fog, it had remained unseen because Mourette was facing the opposite direction in order to save her boat from the brutal shore. You can believe that it was a complete surprise to Mourette when her boat struck the boulder! Luckily, rather than breaking, the sturdy craft merely tipped precariously and threw her from her boat into the water.

Yet not all was wrong! Mourette was an experienced sailor and a magnificent swimmer. She had been in many dangerous situations, and was well prepared for this emergency. Though she was surprised and upset that she had been thrown overboard, she kept her head enough to swim after her boat before it disappeared into the fog.

The boat was fast and she gained slowly. Her chase lasted more than two miles through the cold water and cold fog, but when she finally swam up to it she had enough strength left to pull her self on board. She was exhausted. Wet and tired, she laid down on the bottom of her boat to rest a moment and instantly fell fast asleep.

As she lay unconscious, her boat successfully navigated a series of rapids by itself through luck only, and was carried by the river to a vast bay where the fortunate unguided craft threaded its way between the large freighters there before drifting with the current to the sea. It was a good thing Mourette was asleep, because the numerous close calls would have certainly scared her!

When she woke up, her boat, her cheese and she were out of sight of land and utterly lost...but at least not in immediate peril. She was angry at herself for falling asleep, though she knew she couldn't have stayed awake.

When she calmed down enough to think, she thought quickly and understood that the current had swept her all the way to the sea. Now she was in unfamiliar waters, unfamiliar with the geography of the shore, unsure of where she really was. A hopeless situation! But, instead of giving up, she remembered that the river generally ran to the west, and if she could guide her boat east, she was bound to sight some land.

And sure enough, when she raised her sail to catch the wind that was heading in her direction, within an hour she saw land and a major city too. But as she began to smile and think things were looking up, speed boats came from over the horizon. Raising her binoculars to her eyes, she saw them to be flying black flags...Pirates!

She knew she couldn't outrun their motor boats, but she certainly wished she could! It wasn't ten minutes before she was surrounded by masked men and women

wielding guns and demanding her cargo. She obliged them, but only after giving her regrets that she had no crackers to offer the pirates to go with their newly-stolen cheese.

The pirates did not appreciate her humor. They simply could not believe her story or that she was carrying only cheese. She tried to explain that it was very special goat cheese, and that it was worth a lot, but they ignored her. They searched her boat from top to bottom—an easy thing to do in a canoe. When at last they were satisfied there was nothing worth stealing, they were very angry. In as a polite and businesslike way as is possible at gunpoint, they ordered her to give them the contents of her pockets and purse, and told her to get off her boat and into the water. She then watched helplessly as they dynamited her boat, and then sped off, leaving her to sink or swim many miles from shore.

When the last pirate boat was out of view, she thought she was certainly done for, floating alone in the ocean as she was. But then there was another ship! The pirates were being hunted! Mourette watched as one by one the pirate boats were blown up, their debris flying skyward. After the two minute battle, she tried to signal for help the ship that had fought the pirates, but they couldn't see her. When that ship disappeared over the horizon, she found herself despairing even more than before.

How she wished she simply had not tried to deliver in the fog! What could she have been thinking? What delivery was worth this? As she began feeling very bad for herself and was about to curse the horse that she felt was the cause of her misery, she was distracted by a slight whistle.

Instantly, she forgot her horse. She forgot her troubles, her near death. She forgot everything except for her barrels of cheese,

and these occupied the whole of her mind. Why? All at once, the whistles grew louder and shriller, and barrels fell to the water around her at many hundreds of miles per hour.

Terrified at being killed by her own cheese, she dived beneath the surface of the water for safety. Her mind raced to comprehend what was going on. She realized, while hiding dozens of feet below the surface of the water, that in the explosion of her boat, the barrels must have been exploded straight up, and now they were coming straight down. When the splashes stopped, she came to the surface and looked around, only to hear more whistling. Quick as she could, she was back under the water for safety.

When she was out of breath and satisfied the barrage had at last finally stopped, she came to the surface and grabbed on to one of the barrels and then another, and with the

spare bits of rope floating in the splintered remains of her boat, fashioned a crude raft of barrels. With a large plank of her canoe, she began paddling towards the shore of the unknown city, very glad she would live.

When she reached shore, it was nearly dark, yet the city—like all large cities—was still bustling and alive and seemed like a good place for her to find her way back home from. But it was so strange: she could not speak the language for some reason. The street signs, the store signs...everything was in Chinese! “This is very strange,” she said to herself as she dragged her raft of cheese barrels to shore. “I know I can’t be in China.”

Confident that no one would steal her barrels (and certain that if they did it wouldn’t matter much to her after the day she’d been having), she began to explore up and down the street, looking for answers. Hours later, she was about ready to surrender to

confusion and sleep and return to her barrels for the night when she spotted in a window something which brought strength back to her spirit. She saw something which set the world spinning for her in the right direction again. She saw something which she could understand and made everything else make sense...she saw—in English no less!—an advertisement for some of her very own cheese for sale!

At once she grasped the situation. She remembered that she had one customer that spoke Chinese: if she was near him, this meant that she was not in China, but in Chinatown! And in a Chinatown not too far from her own home!

A crazy scheme began to hatch in her mind, one to get her back and one whose audacity could only be conceived by a woman who had been through all that she had been through in the last day: she would make her delivery deadline after all! She

could ship her barrels to the restaurant, and still make her delivery deadline! Ha! She laughed at the thought of triumphing against all odds!

Now she walked with purpose and intent, searching, searching for a branch of her bank. At last, she found one. But it was closed. Of course it would be...it was after dark. Her ATM card? Taken by the pirates, and now probably at the bottom of the ocean. But how would she get money to mail her cheese?

She ran as fast as she could to the shop which sold her cheese. She knew the owner pretty well...but well enough to ask for this big of a favor? It was true she looked disheveled, but now was no time to worry about unprofessional appearances and actions. A thousand trivial and mangled thoughts ran through her mind before getting to his store.

What followed happened so quickly she was astonished. She told the whole story to him and then asked him for a very large favor: an advance payment for the next cheese shipment so she could make delivery to another customer. And he gave it to her! Well, how could he refuse? After seeing what she would go through to deliver cheese, after seeing her heroic commitment to customer service, how could he say no to her in her moment of need? Who wouldn't want her as their friend?

With the money she hired a truck to carry herself and her barrels to the restaurant, and herself to her home. Once there, she would take a warm shower and sleep in her own bed. She was out of the money she was due for her next cheese shipment to the coast, but at least she was alive and she had made her delivery to the restaurant.

She and her barrels arrived at the restaurant the next day. While the staff of

the restaurant helped unload the barrels, the Chef saw how unkempt she was (she still had not been home yet). “What happened to you? We were expecting you yesterday, because you always deliver early. When you didn’t come we feared the worst, but now that I see you in this state, I don’t think we had very good imaginations to think of the worst that could have happened.”

So Mourette told him of her adventure, and the Chef almost could not believe his ears. “And the cheese made it through all that?” the chef asked in amazement. Mourette was about to agree, but then realized she didn’t know for sure. “Well, let’s check,” she suggested.

One by one they opened the barrels and all the cheese was fine. Yet there was one problem: there were five too many barrels after all the cheese had been accounted for! “Extra cheese?” asked the Chef. Mourette shook her head, “no, I clearly remember not

bringing any more than what I was going to give to you.” Mourette and the Chef, uncertain but curious about the extra barrels, set about opening them. Inside there was gold, silver, gems and other riches. Mourette was so stunned she couldn’t think.

The two of them stood over the riches for some time, thinking and staring at it. As, one by one, the Chef’s staff wandered into the store room for something or another, in turn they each got equally distracted by the barrels filled with riches. Soon, though there were customers still dining and wanting to be seated and wanting to order their meals, every employee of the restaurant was in the store room, mesmerized by the treasure. “I don’t know how, but it must be some of the booty from those pirates who attacked you,” the Chef suggested finally.

And then it made sense to Mourette: when the pirate boats were blown up, the barrels must have rocketed towards her, and

landed in the second barrage. The thought made her giggle: she had been contented by knowing she only arrived home safe; now she had arrived home wealthy!

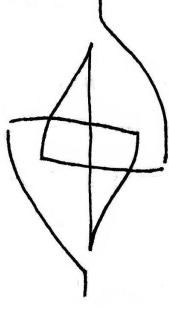
She split the contents of one of the five barrels among the Chef, his staff and with her customer in Chinatown who had been a very good friend to her—in doing so, she enabled all of them to retire for life if they wanted. She then liquidated all but the most beautiful gems, gold and silverwork from the other four barrels, and donated much of the money to her town (specifying some of it had to be spent on lighthouses and horns to make the river safer during fog).

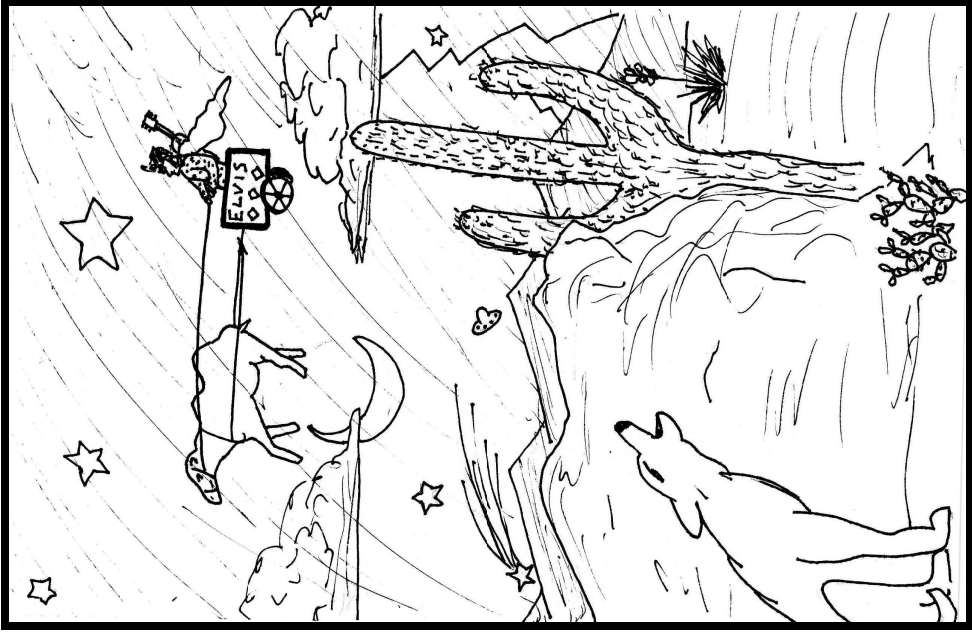
With what was left she bought a new boat and an already-trained Belgian draft horse. Her Hunter immediately took to the Belgian, and they became great friends. But, even more importantly, when Mourette got the Belgian, she took to the horse immediately

because she never had an easier time delivering her goods!

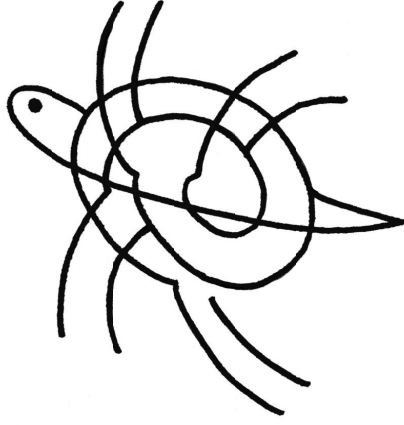
The rest of the treasure she tried to spend but couldn't: even after she spent money on her home, her dairy, her land and all sorts of other nice things for her to remember her most difficult cheese delivery, she had lots of money left over. What did she do with it all?

She put it in a barrel and sent it down the river for someone else to find by surprise.





The Tortoise  
And the Hat



Once there was a Tortoise that lived by a lake. It was a very beautiful lake in a green meadow. There, surrounding the meadow on three sides, were thick forests of ash, maple, chestnut and poplar trees. The Tortoise loved to walk along the lake because upon such a walk the Tortoise would without fail find some adventure. Well, on one warm afternoon, the Tortoise was walking along and found a hat!

The hat was amazing, though the Tortoise had no idea what it was. It was soft and big, warm (but not too warm) and a wonderful hiding place too. It could be walked on and an amazing view could be seen from its top! It was so amazing that the Tortoise had to tell all his friends.

The birds and small furry things, and the large furry things and the lizards all came to see the Tortoise's hat, and each one of them agreed it was great. "That will keep you nice and warm in the winter," admired the owls,

“we only wish we had one too!” “Well,” said the Tortoise, “since you wish you had one and I have one, we can share!” The owls were very happy about that. “And it looks so fun to play in,” said the excited rats, “we think we’d be busy all day just playing in it if we had one!” “Well,” said the Tortoise, “since you would love to have one and the owls and I have one, you can share it too!” The owls hooted in agreement. In fact, not one animal could think of anything bad about the hat, and each wished they had been as fortunate as Tortoise to have found it. And so it was that every animal agreed to share the hat.

One day the Tortoise was sitting on the hat when it rained so hard that the lake rose and the hat rose with the lake. The Tortoise was very scared, since he didn’t know how to swim. “Help!” he cried, “somebody help me!” The beavers and the otters came as quick as they could, and so did the fish, and

all the birds who could swim. “What’s wrong?” they asked. “I can’t swim and I’m scared that if I don’t get back to land I’ll drown!” said the Tortoise. “Don’t worry!” they all said, “we’ll get you there safe!” And sure enough they pushed the hat to shore so the Tortoise could get off.

Safe and sound, the Tortoise disembarked and thanked his friends. “No problem! Anytime!” they assured him as they swam off to get out of the rain. The Tortoise, waved them goodbye only for a moment because he wanted to get out of the rain, too. He found shelter under a bush, and waited until the rain let up. But as he was getting ready to go on his way, he noticed he was on the far side of the lake—where he’d never been before. How exciting! He decided he’d walk around and see what there was to see before heading back home.

Looking away from the lake, he saw a small house and so he decided to see who

lived there. He walked towards it, but it was much further than he thought. He walked and walked, and the house just kept growing larger and larger. When the Tortoise was finally at the doorstep, the house was humungous! The Tortoise knocked as loud as he could at the door, but nobody answered. “It’s probably because I’m so small and they’re so big that they can’t hear me! I’ll just wait here, out of the way, until someone comes or goes. Then I’ll introduce myself!” And so the Tortoise waited.

Up the path came a huge animal that the Tortoise had never seen before, holding a package under one arm. The animal walked upright on two legs, had strangely colored fur (or was it clothing?!) and was bald except for a little hair on its head. “Hello!” yelled the Tortoise as loud as he could. The animal looked around but, at first, couldn’t see who had hailed him. “Oh, hello!” said the animal in a deep voice that was very friendly. “I

don't believe I've met you before! I'm Benjamin. I live here, in this house."

The Tortoise looked up and said as loud as he could, "Hello, my name is Tortoise, and I live by the lake." The Tortoise began to tell the Benjamin all about how he had gotten to his house when the Benjamin exclaimed, "aha! I lost a hat by the lake! I was wondering what became of it!" So the Tortoise told the Benjamin all about how the animals shared it, and found it comfy, and then offered it back to the Benjamin if he should want it. The Benjamin smiled. "Well, I'm glad you all like it, and I'm glad you have gotten a lot of good use from it! I just went to the town and bought a new one, but after hearing how much it's being enjoyed I'd say you all could keep it even if I hadn't!"

The Tortoise was very glad the Benjamin was so nice. "What is the town, Benjamin?" the Tortoise asked. "The town is a place where many people like me built houses and

live, and where I buy a new hat when I want one,” explained the Benjamin. “Want to see my new hat?” And so the Benjamin opened his hatbox and showed the Tortoise his new hat. It was really nice looking, and seemed to be very comfortable when the Benjamin put it on to model it for the Tortoise.

After talking a bit about this and that, the Benjamin invited the Tortoise in for hot chocolate and tea. They talked all afternoon about those so many things that are unimportant but which made very enjoyable conversation. Some of the most enjoyable conversations have no purpose or relevance, and these idle words form conversations that pass hours away like minutes and that—while unmemorable for the specific things said—are the ones which are savored and remembered most fondly.

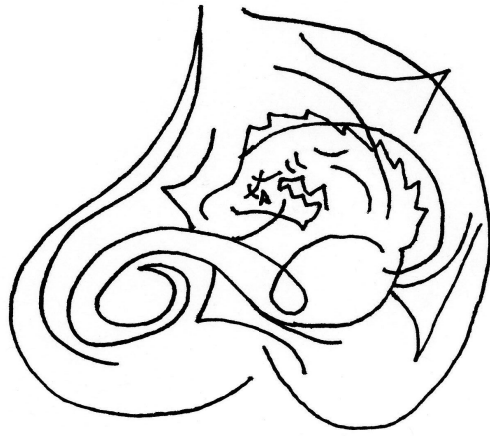
So the afternoon waned on into evening, and dinner was shared. After desert, the Benjamin invited the Tortoise to spend the

night so he wouldn't have to travel back home in the dark. The Tortoise thanked the Benjamin, and promptly found a nice warm spot on the couch and fell asleep.

In the morning, the Tortoise had a nice breakfast with the Benjamin of oatmeal, said goodbye, and invited the Benjamin to come to the lake to go for a walk with him the next week: there would be wonderful stories for them to share, interesting creatures to meet, adventures to have...and a very comfy hat that the Benjamin would certainly recognize and want to see.



How A Cruel  
Dragon Poisoned  
Its Lair



There was a woman who killed a terrible dragon.

Though she was born in a city, from an early age she loved to walk the nearby forests after the foxes and mosquitoes had gone to bed and watch the stars to the sound of crickets, staying until the meadowlark sang to the rising sun and the world woke up. But over the years, the city grew and by the time she was almost an adult, the street lights made it difficult to stargaze.

When at last she could drive a car, she would drive to the edge of the city and watch the spheres turn. But every year she would have to drive further and further because the city kept growing. Mile after mile of forests and farmland were destroyed to build houses for people who did not care to stargaze and who thought of the mosquitoes and foxes as pests.

At last the crickets and mosquitoes were silenced by the suburban pesticides; the foxes were buried alive in their dens by bulldozers. Even the wells were poisoned, and became unsafe to drink. When the prairie meadowlark was forced to fly further than she could drive, her anger at being robbed of her rightful pleasures transformed into a hate of those wrongs against her which destroyed what she loved. Years passed without hearing the meadowlark or seeing bugs and foxes, and with each passing day she grew to feel less and less at home in the lands she called home.

But she had not actually seen for herself people doing these terrible things, and she believed the immensity of the tragedy was too great to have been done by people. One day she realized that a dragon must be responsible: she had heard of other terrible dragons that had eaten meadowlarks, and hunted foxes, that darkened stars, burned

down forests and rendered the streams and wells undrinkable. Why couldn't a dragon also kill the crickets, the mosquitoes, and everything else she loved? She would not be able to see the dragon if it had made its lair in her heart—yes, she knew of many people who suffered from such monsters who had made lairs in their hearts. In her heart it could hide every day, and poison the world she loved at night while she slept and she would never know...

All these musings remained to her only imagination until one morning when she awoke early and discovered the Dragon returning to its lair in her heart. Half in blind terrified surprise, half in anger, she screamed and chased the Dragon through her house and up and down her street all that morning with the intent to kill it. But the Dragon flew away, to return at a time when she would not expect it. Every night thereafter, when the Dragon would leave its lair in her heart she

tried to give chase but could not capture the beast. Every morning she would try to stop it from entering its lair, but was unsuccessful.

Long years passed and she was saddened beyond words at the continued destruction of her home and exhausted from a lack of sleep resulting from her dragon chasing. She was terrified to let her heart near anything beautiful, lest she see the Dragon poison and consume it: like spiders or snakes that poison their prey before eating, some dragons poison the love they feast on. But one night, she came to understand she had an advantage. The Dragon's lair was in her heart, and she could place her heart anywhere!

She thought she could bring her heart away from her home, and thereby spare all she loved from the Dragon. And so she packed up everything and left as quickly as she could. She wandered the west. She traveled through New Mexico and Utah, and

sought refuge in the forests of Idaho...but the Dragon came with her and destroyed all that became near her heart. So when she wondered at the wild horses of Nevada and marveled at the moose of Wyoming, the Dragon was never at rest.

She began to doubt whether she could catch the Dragon to kill it, and worried because she did not know any other way to rid herself of the beast. She knew that if she could bring her heart to live in ugliness where other dragons had already poisoned all there was to love, she might starve the beast out, but this would hurt her almost as much: people live on love as much as dragons. She could not starve out the Dragon, and she could not afford to starve herself.

The night she began to doubt whether she'd ever be free, the Dragon came back while she was awake. She reached for her sword. The Dragon, seeing this, was not afraid. "You can't kill me," the Dragon

gloated. “You can’t even stop me from poisoning whatever joy you fill your heart with, you weak coward!” The Dragon knocked the sword from her hand with its tail, and laughed as she cried when it returned to her heart to rest during the day. From that night on, the dragon would cruelly taunt her every night before coming back to rest in its lair.

She grew desperate. And so she resolved to try and drown the Dragon in the ocean by placing her heart in its dark depths—though she had never heard of anyone ever killing a dragon by drowning it in any liquid.

Having never been to any ocean to know which one was better, she went to the oceans in California because they were closest. As she traveled to the coast she reassured herself of her decision by understanding that even should the Dragon not die, at least she would be spared the pain of having a heart which was laid to a dragon which would poison any

love with which she filled it. It was better, she thought, to not have a heart than to be subject to a dragon that caused her so much pain.

When she at last arrived to the shore, she beheld the ocean for the first time at Dana Point from atop the cliffs there. Her heart was so purely delighted by the light of the setting sun dancing upon the waves that it was filled with more love than she ever had felt before. She loved the whole world: the earth and sea, and even her own heart—even the Dragon!

Love never poisons anything, but is a great grower and healer of all things. But while love is not harmful, the Dragon found this love to be deadly: the Dragon in her heart poisoned whatever love entered its lair and the Dragon poisoned this love even though that love was of its lair and of itself!

The Dragon was overcome by its own poison and was forced to abandon its lair.

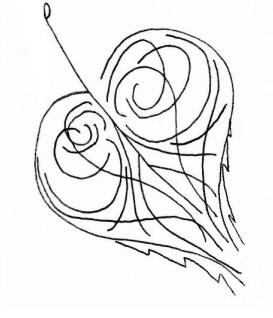
With bloody violence, it burst from her chest and fell onto the rocky shore far below the cliffs, breaking many of its bones. From poison-induced fatigue it lay upon the rocks where it fell, unconscious.

Though she was gravely wounded by its escape from her heart, her love of herself strengthened her so she was able enough to descend the cliffs and kill the Dragon. In the red sunset, her blood flowed from her chest as she spilt the blood of the dragon onto the rocky ground. When the beast was dead, she collapsed from weakness to her knees because of all the blood she had lost, and in what she was sure were her last minutes, she wept for joy at being freed from the beast.

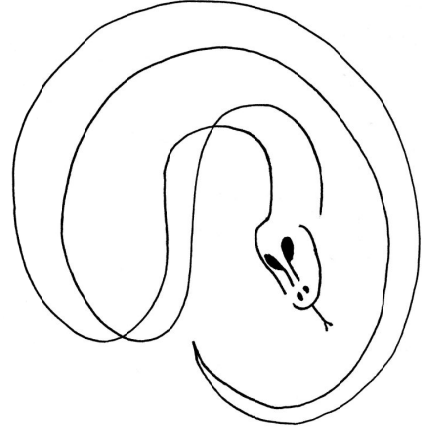
But they were not her last minutes. Though her wound bled terribly and led her to think she could not survive, the wound was not too deep to be healed by her love, and she did not die. When she realized she was still strong despite the loss of blood, she

cleaned her sword in the surf and walked away, and left the carcass of the beast there.

In the morning the dragon's body was dishonored and dispersed by gulls, crows, crabs and other creatures of the beach and sea; the dragon's blood was washed away by the tide. Her wounds healed without scars, and from then on she lived wherever she liked, without fear that what she loved would be poisoned, loving the whole world and her own heart very much.



# Bugs and Sandwiches



Once there was a Snake, and that Snake loved to eat bugs: spiders, ants, ladybugs...all kinds of bugs. And the Snake also liked mice and other small creatures. Well, one day, while looking for some tasty things to eat, the Snake came upon a person eating a picnic in the woods. The Snake, en route, wandered by the person and upon seeing what he was eating, exclaimed “yuck! What are you eating?”

The Man was not offended in any way, though the Snake was very rude. He knew that some snakes never learned manners, and to expect them to know such things was silly. So he showed the Snake, “it’s a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, and I’m having it with rice and vegetables. Would you like some? It’s really good with a glass of milk!”

The Snake was sure when he said, “no, I don’t think so. That food looks quite bad to me.” At this, the man asked, “what do you eat, that you can criticize my food, and turn

down such a tasty offer? So the Snake told the man of all the tasty small things there are to eat in the woods, and when the man said he'd never eaten such things before, the Snake kindly offered to bring him some.

The Man was about to say "no thank you" when he realized that he never had those kinds of things to eat before, and maybe he might like them. How could he know without trying? So he made the Snake a deal: he would try the bugs and small things, and the Snake would try the sandwich, the rice and the vegetables...and the glass of milk.

The Snake was off and back in a little bit, bringing with him some very tasty bugs; the Snake said he'd be back again, and when he returned, he had a plump mouse. Eventually, the Snake brought one of all his favorite foods and told the Man what each one was, and how to catch them. Handing over the other half of his sandwich, the Man

reached for the closest critter the Snake brought. Neither the Snake nor the man was excited about keeping their end of the deal, or with handing over the tasty feast they had brought.

Well, the Man ate the first bug, and it was really quite disgusting. But, he ate the second one anyway—a promise obligated him to. The third one was less disgusting, and by the seventh one, he was beginning to appreciate them. The tenth critter he actually enjoyed and complimented the Snake on catching such a fine specimen.

Meanwhile, the Snake took one bite of the sandwich and thought it really bad. By the fifth bite, he actually began to like it, and by the twelfth bite, he became a fan of peanut butter and jelly with milk (though he could take or leave the rice and vegetables). Both the Man and the Snake were good friends by the time the meal was over, and the man invited the Snake back to his home for a

while; the Snake agreed, but only if the Man would stay in the woods with him for a while too!

Well, back at the Man's house, they played all sorts of board games and read good books and fun comics, and did all sorts of great things, eating peanut butter and jelly with milk and other good foods; but the Snake at the end of a week decided that he enjoyed the woods better—even if there were no sandwiches to eat there.

The next week, the Man came to the forest and he and the Snake caught all sorts of good things to eat, and watched the stars, and did other fun forest things; but at the end of the week, the Man knew he enjoyed his home better. The two parted, agreeing to meet often and do things together like friends do.

Well, coming back to his home after eating so many tasty bugs was hard for the Man. He took to catching and eating bugs

and mice as often as he could—but the other people thought he was a bit strange and wouldn't like to share meals with him. And the Snake! The other snakes thought the Snake was quite crazy to prefer sandwiches and other people food.

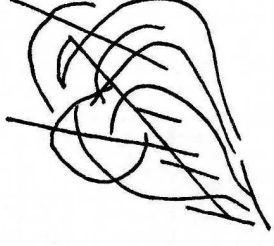
The Man and Snake were upset that their fellow snakes and people would not eat with them, and upset more because being ostracized certainly was not worth the trouble of making or catching the things they had recently learned to like: the Man could never catch as many bugs and mice as he wanted, and the Snake found making even a single sandwich very difficult. Such trouble was hardly worth the reward, and both were ready to give up their newly acquired tastes to keep the company of their own kind.

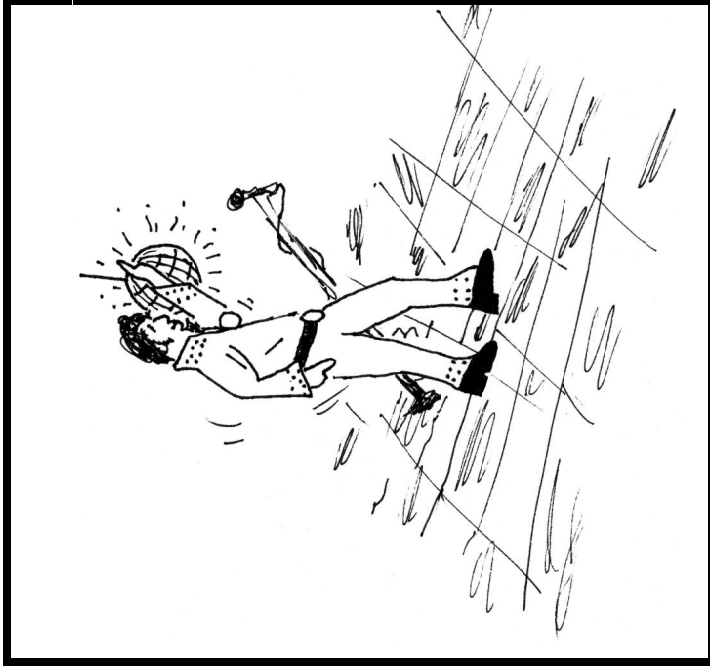
If only they could eat what they wanted, and eat what they wanted without disturbing the other people who had not tried bugs and

mice, and the other snakes who had not tried sandwiches!

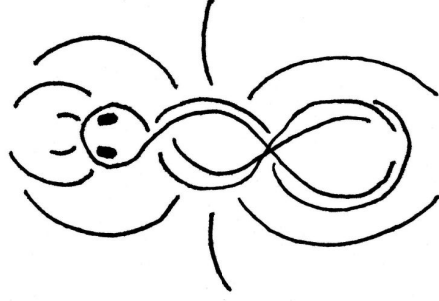
One day they met by accident in the woods, and while they talked about their problems to each other they hit on a solution to all their problems! The Snake and Man invited each other to a picnic the next day for which the Man promised to bring the Snake a sandwich and the Snake promised to bring the Man some bugs and mice.

And so from then on, the man and the Snake picnicked almost every day—some days in the woods, and other days in the man's house—each bringing for their friend to the picnic the favorite foods that their friend couldn't catch or make themselves very well, but enjoyed very much.





# The Restaurant in the Log



There is in the woods a very big log, and it is a nice dry place to rest for the many animals of the pond. It lies from the banks to the middle of the pond, and whenever the frogs, toads, turtles, beavers, birds or other creatures get tired of being in the water, they can rest on the log and be able to talk, or play board games, or do other fun things without ever having to leave their other friends in the water.

It was once an old apple tree whose bows every year were weighted so heavily with apples that any animal who wanted apples could come and have as many as they cared for having without worrying there could ever be an end to the harvest. As the tree grew, it became a shelter against the wind, and hospitable to even the animals that didn't like apples. Throughout its life, it was always becoming a better place to live for all kinds of things. When at last the tree died, the ants

hollowed it out so that it could remain a generous host to all the animals of the forest.

Over the years since then, the ants have steadily improved it, even bringing to the pond wood to expand it. The log now has warm rooms inside that are waited on by the ants and the other bugs who own the dozen restaurants and inns inside.

In some of the finer of these inns, there are warm steam rooms for cold days, but even the most modest of these inns have wonderful reading rooms filled with good books and warm fireplaces. In the spring, beautiful flowers that perfume the air are planted on and around the log for everyone's enjoyment (some animals, though, enjoy them more than others: some flowers can be very tasty!). You can have anything you want at the log, and not at all be concerned with not being able to afford the price!

One day a Snake, who had somehow developed a taste for sandwiches, was out

enjoying the nice weather when he discovered the log. He had taken a path he never took before, just to see what was down it. He'd never seen the log before, though he could tell it had always been there: it was an ancient log from an ancient tree, and was covered in thick comfy moss. From the windows that spotted the exterior, friendly faces peeked out and talked with friends who appeared in other windows or in the pond. There seemed to be nice patio seating on top of the log, where many animals were enjoying the weather under big umbrellas. The Snake must have been looking at the log in wonder for some time because a squirrel called down to him from a tree branch and asked, "never seen the log before, have you?"

The Snake looked up, and saw a very old squirrel smiling at him, and smiled back. "No, I haven't. Would you tell me about it?"

The Squirrel smiled, "that log is a very special place: it is a place you can have

anything you like, and not even worry about the price; you can sit there all day, and never be far from the pond or your friends. And if you love to play board games or just have a nice conversation in a steam room...well! That's the place for you. I really suggest you at least see it even if you don't think you'll enjoy staying there—it is so interesting a place! You'll be challenged to find another log quite like it." While the Snake continued to look at the log and considered what the Squirrel said, the old Squirrel climbed up a ways, and said goodbye.

It didn't take so much time for the Snake to decide he wanted to see the log. Who could resist seeing such a thing, or enjoying such a promise of hospitality?

As he went as fast as he could to the banks of the pond where the log sat, he talked to himself he was so excited. "Well, that squirrel says I can get anything I like there. I really would like a sandwich, but I

would be very surprised if they offer any...I don't know anywhere in the whole forest to get a good sandwich—or any sandwich at all!”

The Snake thought to himself that if they made good sandwiches there, he'd come by as often as he was in the neighborhood. And then the whole way there he fostered the hope that they would have good sandwiches. He began to build his hopes, and grow very hungry so that all the way to the log he got more and more excited at the possibility of having a good sandwich anytime he wanted.

When he at last arrived at the log, he inquired and received directions to the restaurant where they could make him a very good sandwich. As the Snake grew closer and closer to the restaurant, the smells of wonderful food filled his nose. “Well, this is a good sign!” thought the Snake.

He slithered in, and found it to be a very fancy restaurant indeed! There were expensive carpets on the floor and nice

windows for looking over the pond (opening up so you could talk to whoever might be outside that you might want to talk to). There was a crystal chandelier hanging from the ceiling, and across the foyer there was a live string quintet of animals who were playing light music in the corner.

This ensemble the Snake had to look at closely! Four squirrels played a single cello, and all four were wearing matching red scarves; three ducks played the viola, wearing among them one piece each of a three piece suit; two bears in bright green socks played two violins; one person in a very striking hat played on the piano; and two beavers in neckties were playing a single guitar.

The Snake must have watched them for a long time, because while staring at the strange musical group, he was approached by the maitre d'—a smartly dressed ant in a yellow dress—and didn't even notice! "I am so glad you are enjoying our music so much, but may

I interrupt your pleasure to invite you to lunch?" the ant asked.

At first, the Snake didn't know who was talking so politely to him: the small voice seemed to come from beside him, but there was no one there! It took him almost a minute to find the ant addressing him, and then (because the whole experience was so very different from anything the Snake had ever had and he was overwhelmed) all he could do was nod distractedly while staring at the marvel of this ant!

The maitre d', thinking it was her fine dress that had distracted the snake so much, smiled at the Snake's stupefaction and quickly showed him to a very nice booth. As the Snake entered the booth he noticed it was clearly made to be as comfortable as possible for a snake his size.

"Good afternoon, Sir!" welcomed a tiny voice. The Snake looked all around to see where it was coming from, and then noticed a

insect near his fork that, upon closer inspection, was an ant dressed in a tiny two-piece suit. “Hello! My name is Anne, and I’ll be your waitress today. I don’t think we’ve seen you here before...is it your first time at the Log?” The Snake, bewildered by the smallness of the creature now addressing him, could only nod to affirm that it was his first time talking to an ant—and...er...eating at the Log.

The Ant clapped four of her hands together twice, summoning a swarm of ants “then it is my great pleasure to welcome you to our log!” While a glass of water was filled by about five thousand deft ants performing remarkable acrobatics, the Snake’s waitress-ant climbed forward to the plate and asked, “would you like some of our tastiest bugs, or perhaps a nice mouse today, Sir?”

When the Snake didn’t take his eyes off the thousand ants filling his water and did not reply right away, she eagerly added, “if you’re

looking for something a bit different, we have a wonderful selection of imported mice and bugs that have been popular with other snakes who come here! They are served in a red sauce that is quite good.”

The Snake, with all his strength, tried to concentrate on answering the waitress ant, but it was hard to not be mesmerized by the small ballet required to fill his water glass, or the intricate dance that was required to place the menu in front of him. When faced also with the helpful ants forming arrows to the items the waitress ant was talking about, the Snake found it increasingly difficult to maintain his thoughts.

Shaking his head to try to clear his mind, “Actually, I would like peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. And I’d also like a glass of milk, please.” The Waitress-Ant looked a bit surprised, but recovered herself almost immediately. She promised it would be right

out and then she scurried towards the kitchen as fast as her six legs could carry her.

And right out it was! The Snake had only just begun to look out the window when a plate full of sandwiches was under his mouth, and a glass of milk was lifted onto the table by a host of ants who, once the food was served, all bowed courteously and simultaneously, and departed as quickly as they came.

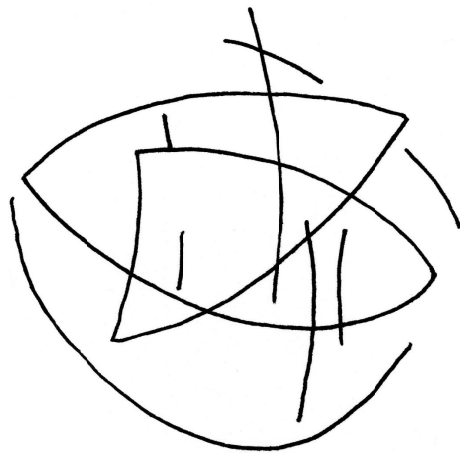
After a few bites, the Snake decided sandwich was not really very bad at all—it was, in fact, the best sandwich he'd had in a very long time! That meal he ate more than a half dozen sandwiches of the same caliber, and drank four glasses of milk.

As he sat in the comfortable booth reflecting on the wonderful meal, he began congratulating himself for traveling a different route that day so he could discover such a wonderful restaurant.

After that day the Snake returned very often, never growing tired of those fine peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, or of watching those magnificent ants who were so dedicated to making life easier and better for any guests that came to their log.



The Evil Princess  
Who Did Many  
Good Things



There was once a great King whose realm extended over many forests and hills, and good pastures and fields too. The King was exceedingly wealthy, and well loved by his subjects; no King before had been so fair and good. Yet there was a Prince whom the King had appointed that hated the King. He was jealous of the King's wealth and his glory, and sought only to achieve it for himself and so he declared war on the King.

The war lasted a very long time, and was very sad. Many beautiful things were destroyed, and though the King and all his soldiers were brave, nothing could be done to stop the evil rebellion of this Prince: sometimes the best we can do is not enough.

The Prince's armies destroyed the Kingdom, and then the Prince called himself ruler of all those lands. He became a tyrant to the people not only because they had loved the King so much, but also because he could not

stand to behave anything like the King he hated and warred against.

Time passed and the evil Prince had a daughter. He taught her well how to maintain this ill-gotten Kingdom, and made her a Princess. But while the daughter was even more evil than her father we would be hard-pressed to see her so: because her father had done so many wrong things with the purpose of not being Kingly, it was a supreme act of evil hatred against her father for the daughter to aspire to do goodness. So it happened that the evil Princess forsook her right to the throne, and sought out teachers from whom she might learn how to become a good Queen like the good King whom her father hated.

When she found teachers, she studied so well that her teachers renamed her: for how could such a good girl be the daughter of such an evil man? How could she bear his name? From then on, her name was Evelyn.

But as well as Evelyn would study, she found that she could never become a better Queen than the man whom her father hated was a King because she was her father's daughter, and too much evil ran in her blood. When she had learned enough to know this limitation to her will to do evil, she began a search for a student whom she could raise up to the throne who would not be so limited. This student she would teach so well that they might become a better King than any had been before, and through great acts of goodness, allow her to fulfill her hatred against her father.

The evil Prince grew old and died but his daughter remained so hateful towards her father that she did not waiver in her search, and did not reconsider even once her decision to forsake the throne. Because the evil Princess had forsaken her throne long before and there was no clear successor to the throne, there was civil war and terrible

battles among the many lords and dames who ruled the lands under the throne for many long years.

Wars led to famine, and famine wrought ruin. After watching the land ruined, all the warring lords and dames decided they had had enough war and one by one gave their support to one of two opposing camps in the hope that the wars could be brought to a speedier end that way: all agreed that it was better to have one large final battle than an endless series of encounters.

One of the camps was led by the grandnephew of the King whom the evil Prince had overthrown. He was at war with the grandniece of the same King's wife and Queen. At the time when they were preparing battle against each other, they had never met each other before.

As the grandnephew and grandniece massed their armies, Evelyn saw an opportunity for peace—and a great act of evil

against her father. She approached the King's grandnephew in his tent the night before the final battle and asked him to make a bargain: Evelyn promised him the throne, if Evelyn could have his first child. This, of course, was an easy bargain to make for the King's grandnephew and, upon promising to be bound to those terms, Evelyn gave him a flask of a strange liquid to drink the next day: she instructed the grandnephew to drink it while riding forth to meet the Queen's grandniece to set terms before the battle. The grandnephew did not know how such a flask would gain him the throne, but agreed to do so.

Then Evelyn went to the grandniece's tent, and asked her to make a bargain. Evelyn promised her the throne if she would give her first child. And, as quick as the King's grandnephew, the Queen's grandniece agreed to the terms. Evelyn gave her a flask to drink also, telling her to drink it while

riding forth to meet the King's grandnephew to set the terms for the battle. She was puzzled, but agreed to do so.

The next day the armies stood opposing each other. When the two heirs to the throne met each other in the middle of the field, both planned to offer the other only a fight to the death without mercy. But instead they fell in love: the drink Evelyn had given them was a love potion. How could they do war to each other when they loved each other? In only a few minutes, they understood that they should be married and share the throne they both held claim to, thereby bringing an end to the wars.

Just nine months later, the King and Queen gave birth to a beautiful girl, whom they named Joan. When Evelyn came to take the child, though, the King and Queen were too sad to let her go because she was such a beautiful child. There was no doubt in their minds that she would grow up to be a

very great Queen. When they refused to give Joan to her, Evelyn reminded them of their promises. But the King and Queen reminded Evelyn of hers: Evelyn had promised each of them the throne, and now neither one truly had it because they shared it between them.

Evelyn had not completely fulfilled her promise to them, and so they were at liberty to not completely fulfill their promise to her. This Evelyn was forced to agree to. She demanded though, that the next child be given to her, and these terms the King and Queen knew to be fair, so they agreed.

Well, soon they gave birth to a boy, and named him Andrew. Evelyn returned for the boy, and though the King, Queen and Joan were terribly sad to say goodbye, they did so because if they did not honor this promise, how could anyone believe any of their other promises? They kept their word and gave the boy to Evelyn that day, but the next day

they made a new promise: to take back Andrew from Evelyn. But the King and Queen died in their sleep the night they swore this new promise, and were never able to act upon it.

Though it seemed a natural death, Joan could not forget that Evelyn could make very clever potions, and believed Evelyn to have poisoned her parents out of fear that Andrew should be taken from her. So before her coronation, Joan announced to all the dames and lords, ladies and gentlemen, and to all the people of her realm, that she would abandon the throne if no one would help her avenge her parents.

No one wanted her to leave, for they knew that if she did, there would be no orderly transfer of power and soon there would be war. They did not want her to go and avenge her parents alone; but they had no proof against Evelyn to give cause to join her. It was nonsense to believe Evelyn had

poisoned them. Hadn't Evelyn helped them to the throne, and done so many other good things? Wasn't Evelyn always working against evil things? No one could believe Evelyn had enough evil in her to be capable of murder, because she had done so many good things.

No matter how Joan tried to explain the situation no one would believe her, and so she was forced to leave the realm alone in search of justice against the murder of her parents. When she left, there was war as everyone had feared, and it was far more terrible than any one could have imagined. Now there was no hope of any rightful heir to help the people hold hope.

When Joan left, she studied under very great teachers so she might learn as much as Evelyn knew. This way, if and when she would meet Evelyn again, she would be Evelyn's equal—if not her master.

After a few decades, when she felt she had learned enough, she went in search of Evelyn. But Joan wandered many years without ever finding her.

One day Joan came in her search to the Island of Apples. The people there welcomed her without even knowing her purpose: in those days it was the custom of all learned people to travel and offer freely the benefits of their learning to those who needed them—only rarely did learned people travel for other reasons.

She was brought to meet the King of that place, and even as she explained at court why she was wandering, she found she could not continue her search for Evelyn or Andrew: she had fallen in love with the King and the King had fallen in love with her.

In little time they were married and she became his Queen and over time she came to love the Island of Apples as much as its King. How could the people of the Island of

Apples not love their Queen? She found herself so much at home that, on an unhappy day her King died protecting the docks against the marauding pirates which frequented the waters there, she found herself the ruler of a land that was as much her home as the one she was born to.

But though Joan stopped her search for Evelyn and Andrew, Evelyn and Andrew had not been idle. Evelyn taught Andrew all that she knew, and made him a master of many arts. Evelyn taught him how to be a King, and when he was ready, brought him back to the lands of his parents. Those lands were in disorder, and when Andrew returned, no one could believe his story that he was, in fact, the heir to the throne abandoned by his sister.

One by one, Andrew met every lord and dame and convinced them of his nobility; he fought with those who doubted, and brought all of the camps under his control. When at last there was no more resistance to his claim,

he ordered the rebuilding of the land. He sent his knights and barons throughout the forests and hills, the pastures and fields to establish law. He rebuilt roads, schools and hospitals; the people grew rich under his prosperous reign and built tall buildings, towers, and cathedrals; the streets were filled with great works of art. Under Andrew's rule the land regained and surpassed all the glory that it had ever known.

Stories traveled far and wide, and one by one, the rulers of the earth came to Andrew and laid their swords at his feet, asking him to rule their lands, and do wonders for their people as he had done for his own. No evil nation anywhere was allowed to prosper, and injustice anywhere was not tolerated.

At last stories came to the Island of Apples, where Joan had by then been Queen for some years. Joan recognized the Andrew in the stories at once as being her brother, and knowing that her brother had been in the

care of Evelyn, she knew that if she went to see Andrew, she would find Evelyn and be able to at last have justice.

The people of the Island of Apples—knowing her sad story—eagerly sought to go with her to help her in her quest for justice because they understood that sometimes the spirit in which things are done matters more than what is done, and though Andrew’s kingdom was truly great, it was great only though the evil intentions of Evelyn. Every one of Joan’s subjects volunteered to help her, but she would not even have her own children come with her.

She directed her children to rule her lands in council while she was away, and set out traveling alone.

When at last she came to Andrew’s court, and learned how Evelyn had established Andrew as King, she told Andrew his secret history, how Evelyn had killed his parents. But Andrew would not hear any of it. How

could he believe such a good woman as Evelyn would be capable of such evil?

Joan made many attempts to kidnap Andrew from Evelyn, but every time she was foiled by either the loyalty of Andrew's court, or by the skill of Evelyn. She grew to be hated by all the people who loved Andrew's reign. She was seen as an enemy of the justice and goodness it stood for.

One day, an evil young Prince approached Joan and explained that he was risking much to talk with her. He loathed the reign of Andrew much as Evelyn's father had loathed the rule of the old King, and, like Evelyn's father, he wanted nothing more than to see the King's reign end. He sought an alliance, and so Joan allied with him to help him bring ruin to the kingdom of Andrew and Evelyn.

Through craft of intrigue Joan and the young Prince led the dames and lords to distrust each other, and even were able to

make it appear that Andrew's Queen had been having an adulterous affair with Andrew's Seneschal. This proved to be the undoing of Andrew's reign, for the Seneschal and Queen were as popular as Andrew. When Andrew sought to unjustly punish them under the law, many people came to the defense of the Seneschal and Queen out of a love of the justice which was violated by their unrightful persecution.

Soon there was civil war between Andrew and his Seneschal and Andrew's Queen. As much as Evelyn might try, nothing could be done to keep the kingdom together. So many strong people had come to aid the Seneschal and the Queen and so many strong people had come to the aid of their King that the sides were equal enough and angry enough to war a very long time.

While the armies of both sides weakened each other through many battles, the scheming young Prince with whom Joan

allied massed his armies in secret as Joan advised him to do. At the final battle between the army of the King and the army of the Queen and Seneschal, Andrew's side rose victorious, but was so very weakened by the fight that when the young Prince's armies attacked in surprise, Andrew couldn't win.

The battle went well to Joan's plan until, regardless of Joan's instruction to the contrary, her ally the young Prince sought to fight with Andrew personally during the battle. Knowing that the young Prince was stronger than Andrew, both Joan and Evelyn rushed to Andrew's aid as soon as they saw the young Prince seeking Andrew.

But the battlefield was large and before Joan or Evelyn could come to Andrew's aid in that duel, Andrew was struck so hard on his head he wavered and nearly died. Joan and Evelyn watched helplessly from far away as Andrew struggled to right himself and the young Prince approached to finish him.

There are times when we are helpless to those who we love when they need our help, and there are times we are helpless to those we love when they need no help. Andrew pulled himself together at the last moment, and as soon as the young Prince came close enough, Andrew pierced his sword through the young Prince's stomach so violently that the sword and Andrew's fist went straight through armor and bone; when Andrew pulled his sword back to his side, daylight was seen streaming through the hole. Joan and Evelyn saw this and were assured in their worry for Andrew: though they wanted to be by his side to help him, this was evidence that Andrew had not been hurt so bad; perhaps it was alright they had not been by his side when he needed them.

Though Joan and Evelyn were both eager to heal what wounds Andrew had, they did not fear for his life, and so when they happened to meet each other en route to

Andrew's aid they were easily distracted from their purpose. Evelyn and Joan hated each other so much, and were so confident that Andrew was well, that they fought each other at that very instant. There is not much to say about it: Evelyn was killed shortly into the fight because Joan's anger was much greater and her cause so much more justified than Evelyn's.

Unfortunately, Andrew was not as healthy as Joan and Evelyn hoped, and while Joan and Evelyn dueled, he fell to the ground, mortally wounded. Joan saw this just as she was killing Evelyn. Joan wasted no time, but ran to Andrew as fast as she could. When Joan reached him, she saw him near the point of death. But this did not concern her much; she knew her medicine well and she knew she could heal him and save his life.

Andrew could not understand why his sister, who hated him and his Kingdom so much, was now helping him. When he

asked her, Joan told him to trust that her help was proof of not only the evils of Evelyn, but also of her love of him. Andrew thought on it a long time before realizing that Joan must have been all this time correct: he thanked his sister for rescuing him, and apologized for not believing her from the first—an apology very easily accepted.

The armies of Andrew had, by this point, been decimated by the armies of the young Prince. But Andrew was not as sad as he could have been: they were, in fact, more Evelyn's soldiers than his own, and the loss of the Kingdom was not a loss of his Kingdom so much as a loss of Evelyn's Queendom.

Those there that day saw Joan—that enemy Andrew's Kingdom of justice, whom all hated if they loved Andrew's reign—heal Andrew, bring him to her boat, and sail with him across the sea to the Island of Apples,

never to return. Those who saw it couldn't understand why Joan would heal Andrew.

The Kingdom fell into disorder from ruin, and was easily conquered by enemies from far away who never learned there was once a great King whose realm extended over many forests and hills, and good pastures and fields too; who never would learn or care just how much happier Andrew was as a prince to his older sister than as a King whose glory surpassed that of all others before him.

All memory of Evelyn's father was forgotten, and Evelyn's story so was poorly kept that in our own day there are many who would doubt that such an evil princess as Evelyn could have done so much good.



