

Picnics on the
Shore
and other Naptime Stories



Written and Illustrated
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In this book I draw to a close my stories
for picnics. They were written in
dedication to She who asked a question
that deserved an answer, for She to
whom my heart will always belong, for
She rescued my heart as well as her own
from the darkness that would have
certainly consumed them:

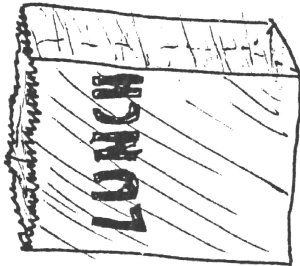
for She is often more brave
than She knows



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When
Richard
Doke



It was snowing. The ocean of human traffic outside was ebbing, but the many waters were not yet still and continued to whisper to those who would listen. Inside, Richard was not listening to anything, but sitting patiently for her to come back from washing up.

Looking at the empty dishes that sat on their table he saw the ruins of a great dinner. He sipped his coffee while he looked at the reflections of the other people in the restaurant on the darkened windows by his chair: in the darkened window, people were coming and going, eating and talking...but nobody was just sitting like he was. Though a large family laughed and talked loudly on the other side of the room, their reflection was as small and muted as the soft hum of the OPEN sign hanging a few feet above the restaurant's door. The dark reflections upon the darkened glass made him sleepy; Richard sipped his coffee until his cup was empty.

Soon He and She would go home and sleep, or else just go home—She and Richard had not yet decided what they would do. He saw Her purse as it lay upon the table, safely entrusted to him, left there to keep Him company. It was the same old black bag that She had always worn, and always would wear; She loved that bag dearly. He looked at his empty cup and looked at Her empty chair, and looked out the darkened window at his own empty reflection flowing over to the dark night outside.

He would wait for Her as long as he could, as long as she required. Humility. Patience. The waiter filled his cup again, and Richard drank more coffee.

He was tired and his mind wandered. From behind the window, Richard heard and saw little of the world in which he lived. Beyond that wall were waves of humanity, rushing through the cold night towards their warm homes; beyond that wall were stars and

mountains, and great unexplored places too. Richard did not see them, and they did not see Richard. Richard leaned back in his chair to ease his digestion while he waited for her, closed his eyes and dreamed of the field that had been — and probably still was — beyond the walls of the classroom in which he had sat when he was very young and only first started attending school.

Yes, there was a field beyond the walls of the classroom in which he had once sat, and it was a very beautiful place. It was a field that was home to many bugs, birds, prairie dogs, coyotes and all sorts of animals that never normally find themselves within the walls of classrooms. It was a place that many happy adventures were always happening — a place usually very different from Richard's school.

On the same day that Richard started kindergarten, a prairie dog ran out of milk for his breakfast and had to go to the market

for more. The market that this prairie dog usually shopped at was on the other side of his town and it was not so far away that he could not walk there and back in time for his wife and children to wake up.

On that day the sun was very warm and the prairie dog had no inclination to be any more uncomfortable than he had to, so he decided to travel underground. Leaving his meal on the table, he gathered a few coins and went on his way, winding through the tunnels he knew best.

When he was a quarter of the way there, he realized he also ought to get some bread. He checked the coins he carried, and he had enough. When he was half way there, he remembered that he needed some peanut butter too. Checking his coins, he saw he had enough. When he was nearly there, he remembered he needed crackers and things for his salad and soup; as long as he was getting these things he ought to also pick up

some flowers for his wife...and he did not need to check his coins to know that he did not have enough money! He had to stop at the bank.

This was a bit of a hassle to him: it meant that he had to get out of the tunnels and venture above ground in the heat. Climbing out of the tunnel and disliking the heat of the sun, he almost didn't see something truly terrifying: four people were making their way to the town, bringing with them a giant vacuum! He had heard stories about this sort of thing happening and knew that they were going to vacuum up the entire town.

But they were already beginning their work! One by one he saw his friends and neighbors sucked up while the four people joked and laughed in the warm breeze. He feared for his wife and children. Not knowing what to do, he set his mind to work and decided to do something about it.

With only the seed of a plan in his mind, he sounded the alarm and called for help, but all the other prairie dogs had already been vacuumed. It would be up to him, and him alone.

He carefully walked up to the machine while the people shut it off (they thought they had gotten all the prairie dogs). To his relief, he could hear the other prairie dogs inside the machine, trapped and uncomfortable... but still alive. He wanted to comfort them by telling them that he was out there working to save them, but didn't want to draw attention to himself.

Assured that there were still prairie dogs to save, he set about his plan. Stealthily, he hid in one of the bags that one of the people had been carrying around. By luck, the bag that he chose was a person's lunchbag and the person whose lunchbag it was happened to be the driver of the truck that pulled the vacuum! All the prairie dog had to do was to

stay quiet and still as the person took their lunchbag with them into the truck. When the person put the bag in his lap, the prairie dog knew that the time to act would be soon...

The prairie dog felt the truck start to move and was about to spring forth from the bag and attack when, by luck again, he heard the person remark to another person that he wanted an apple...then the person driving the truck reached their hand into their lunchbag! Well, the prairie dog needed no better opportunity than that. As hard as he could, he bit the hand and when he tasted blood, he held on.

The prairie dog was at once pulled from the bag and flung around while the person wailed with pain. The truck swerved dangerously this way and that, the passenger person tried to grab the wheel. He heard the passenger person shout at the driving person to fling him into the roof, but he kept holding

on. Even when he felt the hard roof slam against his whole body, and when he was pummeled against the dashboard, even when he felt every bone in his body fracture or break...well, he needed only think of his friends, neighbors, his wife and his children to find enough strength to maintain his hold.

But at last his fractured head and his broken body could bear no more. The world grew dark and he felt his strength leave him; the euphoria of death eased his worries. He felt the hand leave his mouth and he landed on the driving person's soft lap, where he grew quite sleepy. It took him but one moment to recover, and another moment to realize that the driving person was raising a knife to kill him. He thought himself unable to escape doom...but he would die fighting! He opened his mouth and bit as hard as he could into the lap on which he sat.

Well! When the prairie dog tasted blood this time, it was to screams of agony so loud

from the driving person that the prairie dog knew he need not fear being killed so much: he had bitten the driving person in a very harmful place, and judging by the screams, it seemed very possible that the prairie dog might have actually killed the person!

The driving person passed out from the pain and the loss of blood—the prairie dog thought he died—and the truck was out of control. The prairie dog knew that vehicle was gaining speed, and though the prairie dog could not see that it was headed for a wall, he knew that the situation was a disaster. He let go of the person, smiled with satisfaction at the mayhem he caused and leapt from the truck's window to safety.

Before he fell unconscious, the prairie dog was able to watch the truck hit the wall so hard that it went right through, nearly striking the children in Richard's classroom before coming to a halt on its side. Richard, who had been napping, woke up. Both the driver

and the passenger were bloody and unconscious. From the upturned and broken vacuum there were dozens of prairie dogs let loose, running to freedom. From the classroom ran innumerable children. Havoc and pandemonium reigned.

As Richard joined his classmates in leaving the classroom for the field, he looked down and saw a rather badly injured and bloody prairie dog. He knelt down and picked it up. Holding it gently, he prayed that it had not died. In answer to his prayer, the prairie dog opened his eyes and stood up in Richard's hands. After staring at Richard for a whole minute, the prairie dog hopped out of Richard's hands to the ground and hobbled off to join his wife and children.

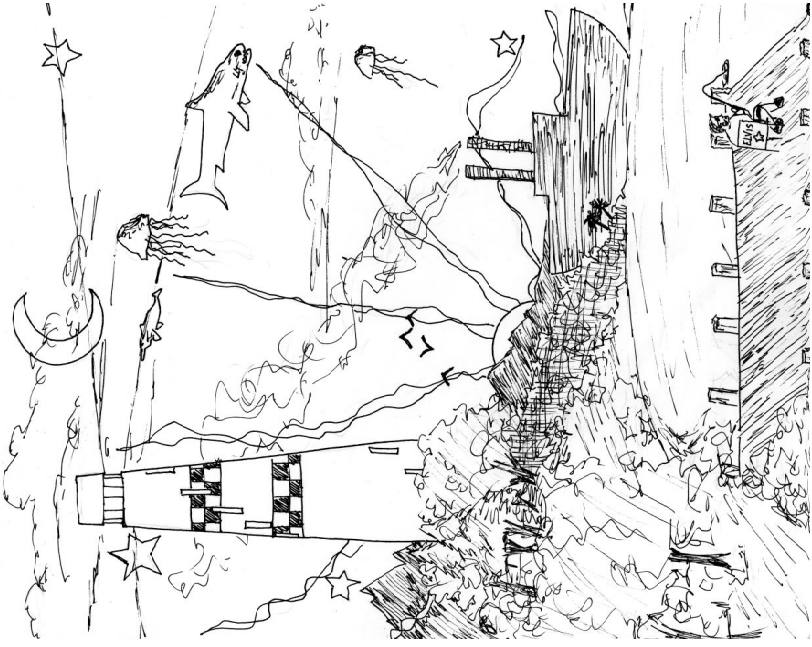
The prairie dog was lifted above the heads of all the prairie dogs he had saved and carried triumphantly home. There he would be treated by the best prairie dog doctors. And you can believe that the prairie dog

never again had to go to the bank if he didn't have enough money!

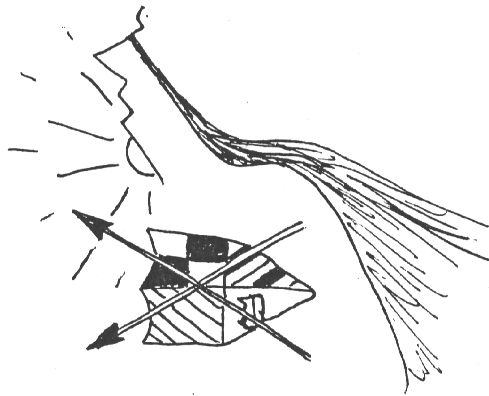
Richard, who had been napping, woke up.

She was there at the table, above the ruins of the meal, picking up her old black purse, rubbing his head, and suggesting that they go home to sleep.





The Three Raccoons



In the mountains, the days at the beginning of the end of summer are as warm and pleasurable and the cool nights could ask for. High above their father the night sky, the stars can be seen shining brightly. Beneath the afternoon clouds, the rains never spoil an afternoon's picnic: in that time of year, the rain falls gently and straight down.

Three raccoons were led by their elder sister through the mountains. Her name was Harriet the White, and she had been the matriarch of their clan of raccoons for a long time before her fur had turned white from age. Now that her daughter was old enough to take care of the clan, Harriet saw no problem in taking some time to visit the far away places in search of adventure. Joining her on her travels were her sister and her brother (Lisa and Samuel), and the three raccoons could not have asked for better company!

They had only just set off when they arrived at the woods beyond the town, and by lunchtime, they were already in the mountains. Eventually the three raccoons came to a place in the mountain wood they decided to rest for their lunch. They set up a picnic blanket on the roadside and were laying out their meal when they were suddenly surrounded by more than a dozen squirrels, each one brandishing a sharp weapon and wearing heavy, notched armor.

One of the squirrels, who seemed to be their leader, stepped forward and, with all the politeness possible when dealing as a captor to some prisoners, addressed the raccoons. “I am Peter, Captain of her great majesty the Queen’s guard, and you are under my arrest. In the name of the Queen, who are you and where did you come from? What is your business in our forest?”

Caught completely off guard, the three raccoons looked nervously about them.

Harriet spoke quietly to whoever would listen, “we came from the city, and are traveling to find adventures beyond the woods in the mountains. This is our brother, Samuel; this is our sister Lisa. They call me Harriet the White, and until very recently I was leader of our tribe: my daughter recently came to an age when I might expect her to not fail those who need her, and now that she is leader of our clan, my brother and sister and I decided we could travel far enough to find adventures worth finding — the place we live is old and civilized, and hardly any adventures are left to be found there. We had stopped here to eat our lunch when you interrupted us. But now that you are here, I welcome you to join us — though I doubt we have enough food for all of us to share.”

The squirrels talked among themselves in whispers for a long time after that. The squirrel who had addressed them before stepped forward again and replied, “your

offer is kind, but I'm afraid we will all wish to eat and there is not enough to share. No, you are guests in our Queen's forest and you shall share her hospitality! You will come with us, and dine in the company of our Queen who will, undoubtedly, wish to talk more with you. She always has enough food for everyone to eat — even in these days of famine and war. So never mind your lunch...you came looking for adventure, and now you have found it!"

And with those words, the squirrel gestured at some of the other squirrels, and the three raccoons watched as their picnic was packed up for them. When they felt the sharp points of pikes in their back, they knew it was time to go.

It was a long walk in the hot afternoon through the forest made shorter by the polite conversation offered by Captain Peter. They walked through the dark forest along hidden paths, among the dappled light of the sun.

When they began to wonder if they'd ever arrive, they came to the squirrel's village and they knew they would not have to walk much longer.

In the heart of the village, they arrived at a palace hidden in the branches of a great tree. Captain Peter turned on his heels and commanded his Lieutenant to "have our Queen's prisoners wait here while I inform our Queen that they have been brought to see her."

When the Lieutenant relayed the orders to the three raccoons, the three raccoons of course saw no objection to this: the politeness of Peter and all his soldiers assured them that they were at least in a civilized place and not in any danger. They were visitors and had committed no crime.

Only a few minutes later the Queen squirrel came, surrounded by courtesans. She offered her hand to each of the raccoons to kiss while speaking quiet pleasantries to

each one in turn. When she was, at last, introduced to each of the raccoons, she took a step back and ushered them through a door. “Please join Us for lunch, so that We can hear your stories; Our Captain has already told Us all that you told him and you may be assured that we are very interested to hear from you Ourselves. You were brought here as prisoners, but — with your permission — We invite you to stay as Our guests and friends. You are welcome in Our hall.”

The Queen squirrel beckoned them to an outdoor room situated high in the trees that was already set for a feast. There were benches as far as the next tree, and the area was filled with the bodies and sounds of hundreds of squirrels, all peacefully disarmed and wearing their brightest clothes. The Queen had the three raccoons sit at the dais with her in seats of honor, seated between her and her captain, amid the nobles and barons. The raccoons were then dressed in

soft clothes and brought water to wash their faces and their hands. At last the Queen sat, and all the squirrels sat, and music began to play. The raccoons then were fed on gold plates and drank fruit juice from silver cups. Never had the three raccoons known such opulence or such hospitality.

After the meal, while the raccoons sat comfortably, the Queen leaned over and spoke to them kind words, which were received in the greatest politeness. When the politeness was exchanged, she opened her eyes wider and pleasantly asked whether the famine had struck their homes as well.

Harriet smiled, “in fact, not. We eat well — not usually so well as we have eaten this afternoon as guests at your table, but well enough.”

Captain Peter could not hold his quiet, but exclaimed “I haven’t seen any rain fall in your valley! How can you eat well?”

Harriet furrowed her eyebrows under her mental strain: it was unfathomable why this would be an obstacle to starvation. She gave a quizzical look to her brother and sister, who were equally puzzled and shook their heads to tell their sister that they had no answers for her. Harriet sat forward and asked the Queen carefully, without any rudeness, “do you not share your food with those who need it? Do others not share their food with you? Or have you simply run out of food to share?”

At this there was much talking and exclamation among all the squirrels having lunch, because there wasn't one that wasn't listening to the conversation at the dais. Over the commotion the Queen was forced to shout. “Share our food? Harriet, We are at war with animals who stole Our food!”

Harriet sighed and shook her head. As she did so, silence returned to the squirrels. “But don't you see, your majesty? That is

why your people starve and why mine do not. We share even when there is not much to share, and we are generous even with those who are our enemies: we give them food before they must steal it—”

Captain Peter interrupted again to ask his Queen if she “ever heard of such weakness!”

“It is not weakness to share.” Harriet stood and pointed at her fat belly and the white hair on her head. “Do you think I have lived so long and become so fat because I’m weak or cowardly? Do you think that my people are any less strong for their distaste of war? Do I suffer theft? No, I think that if you test me you will find me to be as strong as any raccoon, and that we do not shy from any hardship worth undertaking.”

The feelings of open friendliness had faded some. The Queen recognized this at once, and immediately stood to address her guests and her assembly. “Harriet, you have been welcomed to Our table as a friend, and

despite the actions of some here,” she glared at her Captain, who could not meet his Queen’s eyes, “know that you are still Our friend. And it is as a friend We ask you to show Us how We might eat better: indeed, isn’t it a friend who is a teacher, and a teacher who helps Us learn how to solve not only the problems We face today, but the problems We face every day? We would most like to hear how it is that you came to be fat and old.”

Without warning, the Queen summoned her Treasurer to bring ample presents to give to her teacher. But before the Treasurer could come, Harriet, aghast, waved her hands in protest...“no, no! This what I was telling you about! We would love to teach you without compensation — it is enough for us to teach to those who need it! This is not some sort of loan or transaction! Who owns the truth? Why would you pay us for what is yours to share? If you are doing well up

here, we do better down in the valley. Besides," she said smiling, "we are traveling light and such wealth would only weigh us down. We have plenty enough of all we could want..."

The Queen laughed, and everyone else did too. "Alright, then. We demand only that you tell Us — as a true friend would — of how you have grown so old and fat and have come to have so few desires that you would politely refuse Our gifts before seeing them."

Green tea was served with mint and honey and when everyone was comfortable and quiet, Harriet took a breath and began to speak in the long, slow manner that she used when talking about weighty things after a weighty meal.

Harriet began by explaining that by removing a need for enmity, there is no excuse for a lack of friendship. Yet, those without learning easily believe that from those who are given much, more is expected;

that it is the weighty obligation of the strong to protect the weak and that it is the tireless obligation of the sighted to guide the blind. “But don’t you see that these are lies? As much is expected from those who are given little as from those who are given much, and the blind sometimes see more than the sighted who would guide them! It is the obligation of the strong to help the weaker grow stronger (not shield them from the struggles that would help them grow mighty). It is the untiring work of the blind and sighted to together explore the darkness of the world!”

Harriet laughed. “We remove any need for enmity not to defend ourselves against loss, but for our gain: we rely on those who would otherwise be our enemies. Too often those without learning fail to see what is expected of them and either place more burden upon their shoulders than they are required or able to handle...or else shunt

their responsibilities onto others who are 'given more.'

“Where my brother and sister and I come from, we share our food with those we share our world because we love our world very much...there is nothing — and nobody! — that is not precious to us,” Harriet looked closely at the Queen’s Captain. “There is no evil that can be committed that cannot be forgiven. Our enemies teach us many things about ourselves and, like beloved husbands or wives, encourage us to become stronger by demanding great things from us: war results from failed expectations and a failure to forgive. While anyone who sees better must describe what they witness to the blind — those who are blind must describe what they see to the sighted, as well. Those who are given more must remember that they have not been given more of everything; those who have been given less must remember that they are strong in some way, too.”

“But here is how I have grown fat and old: I learned that if you take more of a burden than you need to, you rob someone of the chance to grow stronger from that burden. I care enough for the world I would be friends with my enemies, so that together we might be better stewards of the world we both love. The world is large enough that it is wise to share its burdens.”

“I grow fat, strong and old because I love myself enough to improve and correct myself when I am incorrect and wrong (as my parents corrected and improved me when I was young). Who is better able to find my faults than my enemies? But here is my advice, if I could be so bold to give it, my dearly kind and hospitable squirrels: love yourself enough to heed good advice that helps you become stronger than you were before and expect as much from your enemies with whom you quarrel. Expect as

much from yourselves as you expect of your enemies and children.”

The Queen shook her head. “But *Our* enemies never rest until they have killed Us or have stolen our food from Our children! We don’t have enough! How—”

Lisa interrupted. “They steal your food because they do not know that they can ask you for it!” Samuel was also impatient. “And — with due respect, especially considering this wonderful feast you were kind enough to share with us — I’d risk anything to bet that the reason why they try to kill you is because they don’t know you can be reasoned with, and suppose you to be dumb animals that are as unable to discern a friend from an enemy as you are blind to the bounty you enjoy.”

Seeing the squirrels beginning to become upset by these words, Harriet stopped her siblings from helping too much. “Though they say it rudely, my brother and sister are correct, and no amount of outrage on your

part will change that. You make your enemies ashamed to need and ashamed to be humble and so they are neither humble nor needy. I will be quick and to the point, and hopefully less rude than my siblings: until you encourage your enemies to forgive and forget your transgressions against them, you will find it hard to forgive and forget their transgressions against you; make a new start of things while you still can and you will find you have friends you never knew! If you love your forest as much as yourself, you will love all that is in the forest—even that which displeases you — just as you love all that is within yourself — even the parts of yourself that displease you. Do you not love the meanness of your subjects as much as the greatest?”

Lisa stood and spoke, “Harriet, why don’t you show them.?” Samuel nodded his head vigorously and smiled. “The situation is simple enough. I bet you could set

everything right in this forest by tonight, if their enemies are not too far away. We can then get going in the morning and be over the mountains next week, still on schedule.” Harriet thought this was an excellent idea and begged the permission of the Queen to try.

The Queen’s Captain and all her subjects were against this, thinking that it could be some sort of trap (squirrels, as a rule, are suspicious of everything). The Queen thought some, and looked at her guests very closely for many minutes.

Eventually, the Queen poured more tea and addressed her Captain, “We trust Our friends very much, they seem earnest and honest raccoons. Yet even the honest among us make mistakes. Will you consent to their plans if you are allowed to take all the defensive precautions you deem necessary against the chance of this being a folly?” The Captain swore that this would satisfy him, but

that he would still need to know more about the plan before being completely certain.

So the Queen then turned to her guests and her horde of squirrels, “it is already late in the day and We have no desire to go ahead with this plan right now. But you will all be ready for Our command tomorrow, and will enjoy dinner with Us tonight.” When the applause and cheers had subsided, the Queen turned to the three raccoons and told more quietly, “Our Captain will show you to some rooms where you may talk at length with Us and Our nobles about what, precisely, you are thinking of doing.”

For the raccoons, the night was a long, single discussion interrupted by dinner. But by bedtime all the squirrels — the Queen, her Captain, all the nobles, the barons and bachelors — were so thoroughly convinced of the worth of their three raccoons as diplomats and strategists that there was not one squirrel that did not love those raccoons

dearly. The following day the three raccoons walked at the head of a long processional led by the Queen and her Captain.

Everyone was dressed in their finest, singing happy songs loudly, sounding trumpets, playing fiddles and guitars and flying bright colors because they were to visit with their worst enemies to give them presents and ask their forgiveness. But on their way to the enemy village, they came across the wild horses.

The horses looked warily at the squirrels because at first glance they seemed prepared for a gruesome battle. When the horses looked closer, they saw that all the squirrels were in fact dressed in dress armor: silver and gold things that would no more stop a blow from an axe than the silken capes the squirrels wore would keep them dry against a heavy rain. To make things more confusing for the horses, the squirrels seemed to be led by three raccoons. The Eldest Stallion and

the Eldest Mare went to talk with the Queen of the squirrels, whom they had known since she began her reign. “Hello, Queen Margaret,” the stallion called to her. “What brings you to our field? I hope you are not planning war for today — it is too nice of a morning for senseless bloodshed.”

The Queen stopped and so did everyone else. The music kept playing. “You know, Joe, even yesterday We might have argued that any day an enemy is killed is a good day, and talked to you a great deal about justice — and the loyalty and obligations of Our servants.” And as the Queen laughed at that, so did all her squirrels.

“But no, no, no! Not any more. Not ever more. Today We know better, and so We have commanded Our subjects to rejoice: these three raccoons—who were by an accident brought to Our court—have taught us much, and now We recognize the wisdom of your pacifist words all these years.” The

proud Queen dropped her eyes to the ground in shame, the music slowed and stopped as she knelt before the horses. “It was you who We should have been listening to about justice. If only We had listened to you sooner, We could have sooner shown our enemies our finest clothes and these gifts We carry; what great love We have to share, and what great friendship We can make!”

Unsure of anything except that, indeed, Queen Margaret of the squirrels had seemed to have given up war, the horses stood stupidly silent. Before they could respond, Queen Margaret of the squirrels took off her crown and sword and offered them to the horses. “You rescued me so many years ago, and have always given me good advice. Your parents rescued my mother and I owe you more than I can account. Take from me this great gift, though it is hardly enough thanks, and I will be satisfied.”

Again, the horses were unsure of what was happening, except that Queen Margaret was offering her Queendom to them. Josephine, the eldest mare, called to Captain Peter. “Has poor Margaret at last gone crazy, Peter?”

“Josephine, old friend, a day ago I would have surely killed you for saying that,” Captain Peter said as he bowed low, removing his hat and grinning as broadly as a fool in love, “but now I know better. If my Queen is crazy, then we are all crazy: she is our Queen, and we love her dearly because she is wise and just — and all the more fortunate that I, her loyal servant, brought her these three raccoons as captives.”

The horses whinnied and snorted to each other for more than a few minutes, I can tell you that. When at last they seemed satisfied, Joe approached Queen Margaret and shook his head. “Put away your crown, Margaret—

we do not want it. But we must know: what brings you into the woods, if not war?"

"Why, I thought it was clear? We come to make peace with all our neighbors and to help bring an end to the famine by encouraging all creatures to share their food — as they do down in the valleys from where these raccoons come! Down in the valley, everyone knows that even enemies should be polite to each other, and respect each other: what sort of respect is it for your enemy to let them starve, or to not forgive them...or to not give them the chance to forgive you? They are Our teachers; We are angered at them because of Our inability to please them: yet this is no reason to kill them. These three raccoons taught Us that to respect our enemy is to respect ourselves, and that only when We respect our enemies and ourselves will We respect the fight we share...and give ourselves a better chance at being brave enough to admit when we're wrong!"

Josephine nodded at Joe and Joe said, “well then! Here is at last something we can work together on. Let us come with you, and we shall do many things neither of our two nations could do alone!” The music started again as the horses joined the march.

Over the course of the morning, in a similar way, Queen Margaret and her squirrels were joined by the sparrows, crows, magpies and other tribes of birds. When the birds brought word through the forest of what was being done, no animal was to be found that did not want to help in whatever way they could! The deer, elk, bears, lions and other large creatures helped carry as many of the smaller creatures as fit on their backs. Even the people of the forest joined the march, and their voices sang loudest of all as they carried on their great wagons dozens of smaller animals and great gifts in train!

When all the animals of the forest approached the palace of the squirrels who

were the enemies of Queen Margaret, the enemy squirrels were sure that their last battle was about to be fought: who could stand against such a force as Queen Margaret had gathered about her? It seemed as if all the tribes of the world had been brought before their gates.

Seeing that Queen Margaret and all her soldiers had dressed in their finest clothes, the enemies of Queen Margaret thought that she did not dress for war because she had the greatest confidence in an easy victory. "So she thinks we will give up without a fight and she won't have occasion to dirty her nicest clothes? We will teach her to come to a battle properly dressed and armed! We do not fear the horns or the teeth, the stones or the bullets or even the sharp arrows of her army more than an honorable death!" So it was that when Queen Margaret raised her white flag and asked to speak to her enemy,

Phillip, King of the Shadow Trees, she met an angry foe indeed.

Queen Margaret, as was her honor, began the talk: “if it pleases you, King Phillip, We have come here to end Our war.”

Phillip sneered. “Yes, an end to the war would please Us, but it seems you are either brave or stupid: We are certain that you will find it difficult to do. You will regret your ambition before too long. Yes, your army is great, but be assured that We will all fight to the death before the war is ended, and that you will die by Our hand. You will never enjoy the coming peace.”

“No, no!” Margaret laughed in a kindly way, and so did all the animals, the people smiling broader than any of the snakes, snails, toads and other short creatures that were perched on their shoulders. “We don’t think you understood! It’s not that sort of end We speak of! We have brought you gifts of friendship! See?” And Margaret showed

him a long train of food and wealth that she had brought from her palace, now joined with gifts from all the animals of the forest. Seeing the dark, calculating look on Phillip's face, she was quick to add it up for him: "yes, it is half of Our entire treasury, and you will also find there gifts from the other animals. The bears knew you liked the berries that grow by the river, and the people thought you'd like their bread. Everything that you and your squirrels love is in this train."

Phillip whispered with his Captain many words, and then Phillip asked, "are We to understand that it is a free gift? Are you surrendering to Us?"

The wolves snorted and the monkeys giggled. The entire forest was giddy with joy, anticipating the coming peace. Only Queen Margaret remained patient enough to explain the situation. "No you're not because it isn't and We aren't. With it comes demands and

threats, but We think you will find them quite to your liking.”

Phillip thought so hard that he squinted—he could not understand what sort of trick this was. His Captain nervously handled an axe, and all Phillip’s soldiers were restless. “Alright, Queen Margaret, state your terms. We will hear them — but only because the prize is so great.”

“Excellent! We had hoped as much.” Queen Margaret smiled, “but soon, though you prize this train and fear Our army, you will prize the coming peace and fear yourselves better.” She taught him all that the raccoons had taught her, and Phillip was overcome with regret that they had not been friends sooner. Margaret then invited the horses to explain the plan for sharing all the food of the forest, and Phillip grew hopeful for an end to his Kingdom’s suffering. Very soon Phillip was ready to agree that all these plans were good.

“Really, Margaret! We can see no objection to these plans. We are ready to agree to everything that you propose, and in thanks for the lesson, We offer to you the prize you offered Us: We ask that you keep your train. As you promised, We now find that peace is a treasure fine enough for Us, and shudder at the thought of what We have done and may yet still do if We are not constantly vigilant.” When Margaret and Phillip embraced, the joy of the forest was so loud that many creatures were deafened for an entire hour; the crickets today still have not stopped singing about their joy that day.

The food of the forest was shared from that day on and never did an animal ever go hungry again. Starvation and war were no more. All the Kings, Queens, Chieftains and heads of all the animals met together at least once every month at a great meeting house the people of the forest built in the very middle of the field that Captain Peter found

the three raccoons. There, the animals would discuss how to improve life for everyone in the forest and to settle disputes, making plans for feats of valor and courage that could not have been dreamed of before.

That night, there was a great feast and much celebration. No one there could deny that the friendship of Margaret and Phillip was genuine when they simultaneously proposed and accepted marriage to each other.

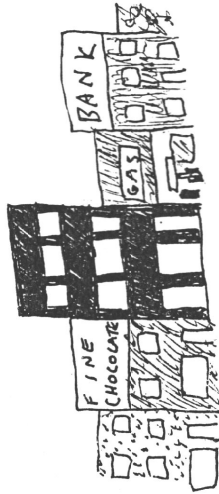
The wedding was held the next day and the happy couple, atop Joe and Josephine, paraded through the entire forest, proclaiming to all who would hear that much of love is challenging those whom we love to have greater courage so that the world shared by lovers is made better for children; we love so that children may learn what it is to be courageous.

The raccoons quietly left after the parade was over (who would miss a wedding and a

parade, even if it made them late departing for their explorations?), but they left welcome to return any time they would pass through the forest again.



The Monkey + the Elephant



In a city very far from where elephants roam the plains of Africa or the jungles of India, there was a chocolate maker whose largest customer was an elephant.

The chocolate maker did not, for a long time, know anything about this elephant except that it preferred the dark chocolates—especially the fruit filled dark chocolates.

Every Tuesday, the elephant would wander up to the door and stick his trunk inside, drop a large pile of coins and paper money on the counter, and then point at the chocolates he wanted. The elephant would then go back down the street and not be seen until the next Tuesday. The event was so regular and so bizarre that business would shut down in the small city to watch the elephant come into town, buy chocolates and then leave for the nearby mountains.

People tried to track the elephant to learn where it lived, but even the most skilled hunters were never successful: the elephant

was as smart as he was wealthy, it seemed: for, indeed, the supply of the elephant's money was never-ending. Week after week, year after year, the elephant would spend fortunes on chocolates. The chocolate maker's shop flourished.

One day as the elephant walked into town, there ran a haggard man after the elephant. He shouted at the people to stop the elephant. "Stop that elephant! Stop that elephant! He has robbed me!"

But who could stop an elephant? The elephant came to the chocolate maker's shop, deposited some coins on the counter and pointed at some peanut brittle. "Now wait a moment, sir," the shopkeeper said in a very stern voice, "this man outside says that you robbed him! Is this true? Do you come here to spend stolen money?"

The elephant looked blankly at the shopkeeper until the shopkeeper realized that the elephant had no ideas about

ownership or theft. “Where did you get this money?” The chocolate maker asked.

The elephant pointed at the money, then grabbed the haggard man by the waist, flipped him upside down as quick as anything, and shook him. Sure enough, while the man screamed for help, a few more coins fell to the ground. These the elephant picked up and placed on the counter next to the others.

Well, this was intolerable. The chocolate maker explained to the elephant, over many hours, with the help of elephant and people dolls, that stealing was bad. How would the elephant feel if someone took his chocolate? Treat others as you wish to be treated.

The elephant was at a loss, though. Where would he get money from?

Well, the chocolate maker had a plan all ready. “Don’t you worry! You can work for me two hours every week and get as much chocolate as you’d want!”

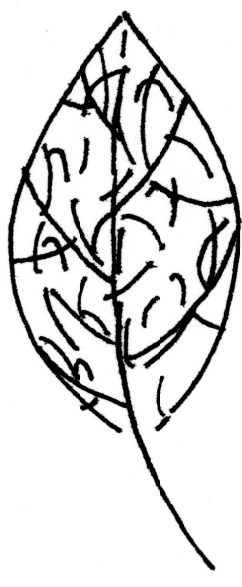
The elephant was doubtful, but when it was explained to him that if he did not try to comply with the law (which he knew nothing about until just then) he would be subject to its justice, the elephant was brought to full accord. The elephant was fitted with a harness and tied to a cart, and made to carry things from one town to another. The more hours every week he worked, the more money he'd get: and with that money he could buy more than just chocolate! There were all sorts of tasty fruits and nuts, seeds and vegetables for him to try in the other towns; there were warm barns for him to sleep in and interesting shows to see! Life was better.

So complete was the elephant's transformation from a wild and dangerous animal to a civilized and safe animal that the mayor gave the chocolate maker a medal of honor, and the honorary keys to the city. So complete was the love of the animal for the

town for its transformation that it defended the town against criminals, bandits and bad soldiers who would have disrupted its tranquility.

Then, one day, after the elephant got off of work, there came into the chocolate shop a monkey with some coins. The monkey climbed onto the counter and placed the coins in front of the chocolate shop owner, pointed at some chocolate covered strawberries and screeched.

That monkey is still visiting the chocolate shop to this day, and to this day, the chocolate shop owner does not know where the monkey gets its coins from.



Reasonable
Cattle



Far beyond the Snowy Mountains there are green valleys filled with cows that live in the trees that dot the open pastures. In these green valleys there are many herds of fat dairy cattle—though not all the herdsmen are fat.

There was one thin herdsman who, though he tried, could not gain weight. His name was Yvain. He had been named after a brave knight who had been stronger than a lion. Yvain always thought himself brave enough (when he needed to be), but even he could not convince himself that he was unusually strong.

When he was younger his parents called him a 'hard keeper,' which is the expression used to say that it is hard work to keep a cow at (or get a cow to) the right weight. He was so thin and gaunt he could see his ribs when he took off his shirt at night to sleep. If he had been a calf, he surely would have been culled.

Needless to say, Yvain was very grateful that he was not born a calf! What needs to be said is that this was not the reason why Yvain could never cull any of the hard keepers in his herd. As his parents did before him, and their parents did before them, Yvain kept a whole paddock separated just for the hard keepers. He would give them all sorts of things to eat — treats that the other cattle never saw — and was not at all upset when they did not fatten.

Yvain's delight was to go on long walks or horseback rides through the green valleys with his wife and children. Sometimes he would take his children fishing in the little creeks that ran through the valley that had no fish, sometimes he would take them all the way across the valley to the river that had more fish than everyone could catch. They'd catch and release, catch and release, and catch them again another day. On the way home, Yvain and his children would sling

their rods over their shoulders and sing their favorite songs. Sometimes, when Yvain rode alone, he would stop and turn off the path to pick wildflowers for his wife and children.

One day, Yvain took his family on a ride and his wife suggested that they go to the nearby hills where they sometimes enjoyed an afternoon picnic. They wandered the paths there and found a tree to sit under. The sun was shining bright and the birds were singing; it was a beautiful day. But then, all of a sudden, as they always do at the change of seasons, the winds came.

In that bright afternoon, the winds were especially strong and especially sudden. The winds blew the picnic away, and blew over the tree that Yvain and his family were sitting under. Yvain and his family covered under the fallen tree for shelter against the projectiles that the wind had launched. And, when it seemed as if it couldn't get worse, they heard the sounds of distant thunder over

the roar of the winds! Then the rain came. The terrified family was able to wait out the storm until the winds died down around nightfall. They then made their way carefully down the muddy hill to their home in the valley.

The following afternoon when Yvain was out among his cattle, he noticed that the thin cattle had mixed with the fat and that, and even with them so combined, there weren't as many cattle as there ought to have been. He suspected there was a hole the fence that separated his paddocks and got his tools ready to fix it. You see, a hole in his fence was a pretty normal thing. Cows were always making holes in his fences and Yvain was always fixing the holes in his fences.

Yvain thought that all he would need to do would be to bring the cows that had wandered into the wrong paddock to the correct one, patch the hole and forget about the whole thing before dinner. But as soon

as he saw the hole in the fence he knew that this was no ordinary hole and that he wouldn't ever be forgetting about it! The hole was precisely where the paddock fence met the outer fence. Yvain's cattle were not only mixing between the paddocks but escaping to who-knows-where! And, it was not just a hole in the fence...it was a chasm, a gaping cave that was dozens of feet across at its mouth, hundreds of feet deep! Rocks and debris were blown everywhere. Dismounting from his horse, he walked to the opening and saw that the grass was singed at its opening and the air coming out of the cave was warm.

Yvain took off his hat and thought hard and long on the stories he once read about dragons. Seeing that Yvain had let go of his reigns and was preoccupied, Yvain's horse wandered with the cattle and found some good grass to eat.

It was true that Yvain was preoccupied, but not with thought anymore. It was all

Yvain could do to simply see the hole. He was torn between continuing looking at the hole (it was majestic to behold!) all day, fixing the fence, and exploring the cave to try and figure out what caused the hole. Yvain's turmoil was interrupted by his horse, the good animal! His horse, while mixing with the cattle, was beginning to mix with the cattle as the cattle escaped out the hole in the fence. Yvain realized at once what he had to do: before anything else could be considered, the fence had to be repaired so that no more cattle would escape.

This meant putting a fence around the hole: the hole was simply too deep to fill in or to put a fence through. And, with that much fence needing to be put in, he would need some help.

He rode up and down the roads that traversed the green valleys, called upon his father and mother and all his uncles and aunts, all his cousins and all his brothers and

sisters. This was such an emergency that he even called on his best friend Lionel to come and help him!

Lionel's parents had been impressed by the name that Yvain's parents had come up with and decided that they wanted a knightly name for their son, too. But there were two problems with this: the first is that Lionel's parents had already come up with a name for their son and had gotten their son's name written on a lot of things: toys, furniture, clothing... The second problem was that their son was already two years old and seemed to be perfectly satisfied with being named Herbert.

Yet Lionel's parents were not easily dissuaded by such small problems and, as you can guess, Lionel grew up owning a lot of things that had Herbert's name on them. I could tell you of how the young Lionel thought that his parents' story (that they had decided to change his name when he was two

years old) was too absurd to believe, and settled on the idea that he had an elder brother named Herbert that had died before he was born. I could tell you how Lionel thought that his parents had simply been too niggardly to buy him his own things, and how he wished that he had known Herbert, and how he hated his parents for pretending that Herbert had not even been born...but such things belong in a separate story.

What does belong in this story is that Yvain and Lionel grew up together and, despite their age, were very close friends and had many interesting adventures — though none more interesting than when they mended Yvain's fence.

When Yvain called up Lionel to help him fix his fence, Lionel did not hesitate one moment. When Lionel had gotten off his horse, he walked up to Yvain and slapped him on the back. "That's a great hole you got there!" The two men then stood and

admired the hole, which was an easy thing to do. Well, at least it was an easier thing to do than rebuild the fence so that it ran around the hole and kept the cattle in the paddock while keeping the cattle out of the hole. At last something needed said, and so Lionel said, "I think I'd better go home and get my kids and wife out here if we're going to fix this up today." "Alright," said Yvain as more cattle wandered out of his fields. "I'll go get post drivers, wire, clippers, pliers and some lunch out here for you when you get back."

Lionel rode back home and came back within the hour with his five children and his wife. Before that, Yvain's family had arrived and was already at work. Lionel's family began to arrive in a long caravan, bringing good will enough to last all day, some dinner for later and songs for between times. They immediately set to work with Yvain's family: while Lionel's three eldest children worked with Yvain and his wife (and Lionel and his

wife worked with them to dig post holes and string fence), the two youngest of Lionel's children joined with the youngest of Yvain's family to round up the cattle that had wandered away.

Neither Yvain nor Lionel had been at all impressed with their knightly names, and named their children more pacific — if no less courageous — names. Names like Mahatmas and Frederick and Nobel, Florence and Martha. However, these peaceful names did not prevent their children from dreaming that they were, in fact, knights born into modern times and wishing they had a name like their fathers.

They took great risks and caught the cattle quickly, competing for the honor of capturing the most ferocious cow of all (it bucked, bit and kicked the whole way back to Yvain's pasture). But the children — despite their heroics — had missed one cow.

You see, all the cattle rounded up easily except one: this one did not put up a fight, but simply wandered off to the green pastures of a far away field, making it very hard to notice in the commotion that Yvain's hole had made. It is very dangerous to miss even one cow. I can tell you that this cow found its way from pasture to pasture that day before deciding that Lionel's pastures were greenest. It laid down in the shade of a great poplar tree and would have been forgotten if it had not been for a crow.

The crow was descended in a direct line of eldest siblings from the chief crow that had settled the valley long in the forgotten past. The crow held a right to all the lands in the valley, and every year demanded a tax. His taxes these days were largely spent on fending off the invading people and cattle that did not recognize his right to the valleys and did not pay taxes (the people never had taken the time to learn how to speak with the crows or

other animals — otherwise they might have learned that all the valleys belonged to the Chief crow).

I will not tell you of his failed attempts to repel the invaders (who were now, and had been for many generations, occupiers) of his lands, but it does come into my story how he tried to collect tax from a sparrow: this particular sparrow was in a foul mood that day because Yvain's cow had wandered right into the bush that it had made its home in. So, when the Chief crow came and asked for tax to support the war to repel the cows and people, you can understand that the sparrow would want to argue that the taxes paid did not prevent his nest from being disturbed!

The Chief crow began to argue back, saying brave words about loyalty and about how the sparrow's cause was no greater than any other animal's cause in the valley, and explain how other animals had lost even more — why, the lions were hunted

relentlessly with guns, and the fish were constantly harassed! But the sparrow would hear none of it. The Chief Crow asked his seneschal her advice, and after a brief consultation, the sparrow was invited to come see revenge taken upon the offending cow.

Cows are difficult to discern from one another, if you're not used to them. The birds were certainly not used to counting cows and Yvain's cow — the guilty beast! — was peacefully napping in the shade of Lionel's favorite tree (where it wouldn't be found until Lionel saw it the next day). Never the less, the Chief crow was sworn and bound to take action, so the Chief crow and his barons shouted for all to hear to come and see a brave victory, a triumphant battle in the war to liberate their valley. When enough creatures came, out of curiosity or a desire for amusement (no one seriously hoped the Chief Crow could fulfill his promise), the Chief Crow and his barons

charged the nearest cow, and pecked at it relentlessly until it began to bleed. The terrified cow ran as fast as it could, but, tripping in a gopher hole, fell right into a fence. This caused the fence to fall down, and startle the nearby herd of cattle into a stampede — right towards a nearby house! Well, the house was knocked down and the cattle were spooked more. The cattle ran all the way to the town, where they caused more damage.

Whether the Chief crow and his barons had planned such destruction or were just lucky is pure speculation, but the crows (of course) claimed afterwards to have planned the whole thing. In any case, half the town was leveled that day and no other animal refused to pay tax to the Chief crow that year — or the next.

The cattle ran full force towards the town, bringing down the water tower and the post office, storming through the streets and

crushing whatever was in their way. The Mayor was astounded and quickly called his police to handle the situation...but there were too few police! The Mayor, nearly in a panic, ordered his Chief of Police to deputize the town and require everyone to help catch the cattle (the Mayor never once thought of shooting the cattle: in those days the rights of property and the lives of animals were more sacred than they are today. Yes, the cattle were destroying other peoples' property...but the cattle belonged to someone else nonetheless and that person could be held responsible better than the blood of their animals).

As the situation grew under control and the fires that the cattle started were put out, the Mayor called upon his Chief of Police and asked that he find whoever owned the cattle and bring them into the town to talk with him. The Chief of Police understood and hurried off to investigate.

Not much after that, Captain Benjamin of the Police, whom the Chief had left in charge while he went personally to apprehend whoever was responsible, approached the Mayor. He took off his hat and lowered his eyes in shame, and told him that the cattle had all been wrangled except one...and you know how it is very dangerous to miss even one cow!

The Captain, when he announced this failure, spoke so quietly that he had to be urged to speak up. When Benjamin looked up from his shoes, his face was red as a beet. “I’m sorry, Mr. Mayor, but it was Jim—you know, who owns the hotel, who gave so much money to your campaign for office last year, who himself paid for the paving of Main Street, who has done so many good things for this town? Well, we deputized him just like you said, and, well, uh, he’s not used to wrangling cattle. Um...well, he...Sir, you have

to forgive him! And me! He and a cow...uh..."

The Mayor could not stand the pace of his Captain's story because he could tell that something very bad had happened. "There now, Captain," the Mayor tried to be patient. "I might be upset at what happened, but don't worry: lots of bad things have happened today and whatever may happen I am *quite* sure that whatever you are coming to report will *not* be the worst thing that happens." The Mayor, of course, was thinking of the terrible things he'd do to whoever was responsible for the whole mess — *that* would be, he would make sure, the worst thing that would happen today. "So let's step into my office and I'll pour you a cup of coffee and you can tell me all about it and later you, me and Jim can laugh about it."

"That's the thing, Mr. Mayor: I wouldn't go to your office right now. There's a cow in

your office, and she's awful mad." Well, the Mayor made Benjamin tell the story at once and quickly! Jim, the hotelier, chased a cow throughout the town—through the bakery, through the school, into the city building, up three flights of stairs and into the mayor's office. The cow had managed to lock and barricade the door so that they couldn't even break down the door to get the cow out. They had to wait for the fire engine—which was putting out a fire at the school started by the same cow—to take some brave people up to the Mayor's third floor window on its ladder. "And the worst part is, someone is calling your office every five minutes...and that cow doesn't like the phone ringing. Every time the phone rings, you can hear the cow kick and break something. It's got to be a huge mess in your office by now."

Well, though it seemed like forever to the Mayor, the fire department eventually got to the Mayor's office and got the cow out — they

had to cut a wider window and push the cow out onto a very large cushion that was placed below. The cow broke its leg, but lived to become the most docile cow in the entire valley.

Captain Benjamin took the injured animal away to be impounded while the Mayor prepared himself to inspect the damage. The cow was never released from impoundment, but was kept as a pet of the Mayor and City Council — the Mayor later said she needed a close eye kept on her at all times, so she didn't cause any more damage, but everyone knew that he had come to love seeing the beast grazing on the Town Hall lawn. As his last act as Mayor, he later made her the town's mascot.

But look how easily can a story become distracted and told out of order!

When the Mayor stepped into his office he was not fully able to appreciate the

damage because the phone at that moment started ringing.

He carefully stepped to the phone through the debris. He picked it up. “Hello? This had better be important.”

It was.

On the line was a General of the Army, asking whether his town wasn’t alright. The Mayor was impressed that his little town’s troubles would be known to the national government. “Well, no Sir. In fact, it isn’t. About half the buildings are leveled - we have filled our hospital with the people who were wounded when the structures were destroyed. The remaining structures have significant damage and the school —”

The Mayor was about to go into a detailed report for the General, but the General simply cursed and said that he would call the Mayor right back and then hung up. At that same moment, the Chief of Police came into what was left of the Mayor’s office

and asked to report. “I didn’t need to go more than four miles to find that Yvain’s fence had a big hole in it (it had to have been dozens of feet wide...and deeper than I am tall. Goodness knows what caused it!). Anyway, Yvain admitted that he had lost some cattle earlier today, but he says that he caught them all (but one) this afternoon and is willing to prove that it wasn’t his cattle that destroyed our town.”

“I’ll bet he is,” said the Mayor as he cleared a spot in the rubble to lean on. The Mayor gestured widely to the Chief to do the same. “But please, Chief, excuse my interruption and continue with your report.”

“Thank you, Sir.” The Chief cleared a spot in the rubble near the Mayor and sat down. “As I was saying—”

But then the phone rang again. “Ah, that must be the Army!” said the Mayor.

“The Army?”

“Yes, they’re the ones that have been calling and disturbing a cow that was trapped in my office. They want to know if our town is alright.” The phone kept ringing.

“Why do you suppose that is?”

The Mayor made himself more comfortable while the phone rang some more. “Well, I guess our town is more important than we think! I told him that it was destroyed and he was very upset.”

The phone kept ringing. The Chief looked uncertain. “Well, what is it, Chief?”

“Should I continue with my report?”

“By all means. I’m sure the General will want to hear all about it.”

“You talked with a General? I’ll be!” He slapped his knee. “Doesn’t that beat all?” The phone kept ringing. “Just think: our little town getting the attention of a General! Well, just when you’re trying to stay modest, a full General gives you the attention of the nation!”

The Mayor smiled and nodded in appreciable agreement. Sometimes the sympathy of the leading men and women of our nation is more than enough to comfort our misery.

“Well, Mr. Mayor, you can tell the General we haven’t searched the whole valley, but I would be certain in saying that it wasn’t Yvain: he’s never lied before, and it did look like he had all his cattle. However, until we find someone else who has lost a lot of cattle today, I must suspect him.”

“Well, keep on it, but bring Yvain down here to talk with me. His hole interests me greatly.” When the Mayor dismissed his Chief of Police, he answered the phone.

The General was not in a good mood. “What took you so long?”

The Mayor generously overlooked the rudeness of the General. “General, I was getting a report from my Chief of Police. What can I help you with?”

“Well, um...Mr. Mayor, the Army is sorry for your town’s destruction. May we have someone come out to help your Chief with his, er, *investigation?*”

The Mayor was puzzled why the Army would want to investigate – rather, not want his Chief to investigate – but pretended not to be. Playing dumb wouldn’t be hard, and was the best choice. “Of course, but why would the Army need to come out? Our Chief is a capable man. And there isn’t much else for you to do, anyhow: we have, you know, all the cows penned at this point and while the wreckage of our town is great, those of us who live here are certainly up to the challenge of repair and reconstruction better than any of your troops.”

The General took a moment to decide whether “penning cows” was a country phrase. “Yes, Mr. Mayor, I know that we’ve been slow at responding and that things may

seem like they're in hand, but it is possible that the rocket still is not safe!"

"Believe me, General, I fully understand that fact and still maintain that we neither need nor want your assistance in investigating or cleaning up," said the Mayor, though he didn't clearly understand anything and more than ever wanted some help. Just not the General's help: the Mayor knew better than to trust the help of Generals that didn't want the Chief of Police investigating. "We are tidying things up here right now and the rocket is the least of our concerns. However, we understand your desire to look at the rocket, and we will let you know as soon as it is possible."

Now the rocket (whatever it was) was the greatest concern of the Mayor. Luckily, Mayors know many tricks for both learning what is going on without appearing to be inquiring and for getting things done without seeming to even lift a finger. This politician

knew that that nothing irritates a soldier like being told that someone else is doing their job. When someone else does their job, what use is there for them? For a soldier, to have someone else do your job is most irritating.

The Mayor knew that when soldiers are irritated, they do more work than is required of them and feel obligated to explain why their job is important and why they must do it themselves. And Generals are nothing but very old soldiers!

“Mr. Mayor, I must insist that you at least let us come and review your town and undertake our investigations independently... Perhaps once we’re there we might be of more help than you think? My troops would be at your command and we’d have money available for your assistance.”

But old soldiers are used to working with politicians and thought that by sharing the job and the glory of its accomplishment with the

Mayor would make the Mayor more reasonable. Generals think that politicians only want glory because it is what they themselves desire. The Mayor smiled: the General was behaving exactly as he wanted. Offers of gold and soldiers! Ah, but he could do better.

“Thanks for the offer, General, I will certainly take you up on your offer once we gain a better understanding of the situation and how we could use your help. Certainly, there are some big tasks here for you to do!”

The Mayor took a breath and thought. Politicians can think while they talk and the Mayor was deep in thought. *Why is the General so insistent on investigating the rocket? How did the General know my town was damaged so quickly?* The Mayor at once knew the answer to his question: why would anyone want to find out what happened in a disaster unless it could have been avoided,

and why could it have been avoided if not because it was human caused?

Generals...rockets... the Mayor thought harder. Certainly it was no act of war: the General would have come immediately and not hesitated had we been at war. It's clearly his job to defend us against armies. But the General hesitates because he has no authority to undertake the investigation...because the General is at fault!

Rockets and armies! I think the General is so interested because he is at fault for all this, the fool. If nobody in my town launched the rocket and no foreign Army launched the rocket, it is probably the General's own rocket! The Mayor did not hesitate a moment more. Sounding as friendly as possible, he talked about the situation casually, as if he dealt with rockets and Generals every day. "General, you can believe me to be quite serious when I tell you that, even though we are a small town here,

we have adequate resources to find out exactly what happened and who is responsible, and we will ensure that the State and the Army will each have equal opportunity to prosecute whoever is responsible to the fullest extent possible. Whoever is at fault will go to jail a long time.”

The General did not respond, and his silence told the Mayor more than any words that he was guilty.

The Mayor looked out his window at his ruined town and about his office at the rubble and frowned. “Please trust me, General, simply taking the time to call me has done more than enough already and I really couldn’t imagine I’d want more from you! You can trust me when I tell you that whoever is responsible will regret their crimes and make adequate reparations. If you can wait until tomorrow, we’ll have things more under control for your visit. And when you come, I am sure my Chief will want to talk to

you personally in the course of *his* investigations.”

The General was smart enough to know when things are going badly. “Well, I’m sure he would. But I won’t be able to come. However, my Lieutenant will be more than happy to answer any questions he might have.”

The Mayor smiled. Was that the best the General could do? “I see, Sir, I understand you’re very busy. But we’d hate to let the State know that you were too busy to cooperate with our investigations into who fired the rocket at our town, and were so disinterested as to not provide adequate help in cleaning up. The State might then be curious to learn how they could help you figure out who fired the rocket and all the damage it caused, since you’re such a busy man.”

Generals can fight several wars at once, excel at hand-to-hand combat and are the

lethal defenders of their nations. But they are usually simply helpless when faced with politicians. The General - poor fool! - thought he could simply walk into the town and, after some investigations and little repair work, forget the whole incident. Now he was fighting for his life and willing to spare no cost to save himself from chains.

“Why don’t you tell me exactly what you’d like, Mr. Mayor. The Army apologizes to you! I apologize to you. This doesn’t happen every day and should have never happened. It will never happen again. With full due respect for your Chief and your town, I will assure you that whatever the condition of your town, the Army is prepared for it - yes, Captain, come in. One moment, Mr. Mayor...” The Mayor heard in the background the General order some Captain to prepare the necessary supplies and troops.

“Yes, Mr. Mayor. We can have all that you need to you by this evening. Your town will

be better than it was yesterday by this time tomorrow! And as for responsibility...well, you're clearly very generous and fair minded for even undertaking an investigation, but I cannot tell a lie. It is my fault — from start to finish. I wished only to learn exactly how much damage in your town the rocket caused."

"Of course," said the Mayor.

"Just talking to you, I can tell you keep a tidy town and so I will take full responsibility for all - *all* — your town's damages. Even buildings with paint damage. Surely nothing was damaged until our rocket landed! I should not have tested that rocket in the wind. Though you certainly have enough resources to deal with this crisis, I have the obligation to make it right and will save you the trouble of a full investigation if possible."

The Mayor looked about his office again and shuddered. Now it was the Mayor's turn to be scared! An army descending on a town

- whether for good or ill - is a tough thing for any politician to manage. Repairing towns requires delicacy, subtlety and accuracy - things which armies are simply not known for. He hadn't wanted the army to come to rebuild and repair the damage, he wanted the army to pay for the town to manage the repair and reconstruction!

But before the Mayor could defend his town against the Army's help, Yvain entered the room, escorted by the Chief of Police. The Chief left and the Mayor silently gestured for Yvain to find a seat. The brief delay was a fatal error and the General took full advantage of it. "Well, Mr. Mayor, since you don't object I'll see you in six hours. And when we arrive we'll take the rocket, of course."

The Mayor, ever so politely, thanked the General for all his help and (even more politely) threatened that if even one splinter was out of place when the army was done, if

all the buildings didn't have new paint, if even one crack was in a single stretch of sidewalk...he'd have the General's stars decorating the space above his office door. The Mayor hung up the phone and bit his lip. *Where was the rocket?* If he couldn't give the rocket to the General, the Army wouldn't fix anything because the General (suspicious fellow) would either think that the Mayor was withholding it so he could give it to the State and betray the General, or (rascal that he was) decide there was nothing to fear from the Mayor and not fix a thing.

The Mayor turned to Yvain and saw him hesitating to sit. So, the Mayor himself cleared a large portion of rubble for a seat. "Please sit down, my friend." Yvain made a large crunching noise when he sat.

The Mayor scowled at the telephone and then at Yvain. Then the Mayor smiled—only politicians can smile at a time like that.

The Mayor and Yvain grew up together and were usually as friendly as brothers, they were neighbors, living on the same road. But at the moment only business was on their minds. “Yvain, do you know why you have been brought here by my Police?”

Yvain was not smiling. “Well, the people outside seem to think that it was my fault that the town is destroyed. Though I do not think it is my fault, I think this is the reason why I’m here.”

“No, the reason you’re here is not because the town thinks you’re responsible. You’re here because I thought, until a moment ago, that you were responsible,” corrected the Mayor, no longer smiling. The Mayor stood up and took a seat closer to Yvain, and began to talk quietly with him. “My Chief of Police informs me you have a rather large hole in your fence.”

“Yes, but I caught all the cattle!”

“I know this. Do you have a rather large hole?”

“Yes.”

“Abnormally large?”

“Well, it’s taken my entire family and Lionel’s family all day to patch it. Yeah, I suppose it is abnormally large.”

The Mayor sighed in relief, smiled and put his hand on his neighbor’s shoulder. “Relax, Yvain! Relax! Have a drink of water. Do you know what caused it?”

Yvain took the cup from his Mayor and drank deeply. Though he didn’t know what was going on, he decided to trust his friend that he should relax. “No, we hadn’t looked in it yet. We were just about to when I was asked to come here.”

The Mayor was stood up and paced through the rubble for a few minutes, his feet making crunching sounds as he thought. At last he smiled. The Chief of Police entered the room and reported, very quietly, that the

cattle in the town came from...from the Mayor's own ranch!

The Mayor was not nearly so displeased or surprised as the Chief expected. Instead, his smile grew and the Mayor laughed out loud and asked both his Chief of Police and Yvain to come with him. "This is good, very good! Wonderful news! The fortunes of the town are secure by your news, Chief! Ah, but I'm hungry after such a long day. Let's grab a bite to eat to celebrate and then look in Yvain's hole and see what good news we shall find. Then, we must track a cow! Lunch is on me. My goodness! What a wonderful day!"

The Chief of Police and Yvain were both confused by this response. Why wasn't the Mayor more upset that it was his cattle that destroyed the town? The Mayor clearly was up to something, his smile betrayed him.

The three old friends went to the restaurant across the street and ordered

lunch. The owner apologized, but there was no seating - it had all been destroyed. “That’s ok, Frank,” the Mayor said, smiling and slapping his back. “We’ll picnic in the kitchen today. Tomorrow you’ll have the place back together better than it was yesterday. If a certain General comes by asking you if your restaurant needs anything, ask for an outdoor patio - it would improve your already excellent restaurant!” The Mayor began to order a turkey sandwich when Yvain stopped him, poking him in the chest with his forefinger: “that’s really bad for you, you know. Too much cholesterol, too much protein, too much salt...you can easily give yourself hardened arteries eating that food and die an early death from heart disease! You ought to take better care of yourself: we like you as Mayor, you know.”

The Mayor looked at his Chief of Police, who nodded in agreement, “yeah, I don’t touch the stuff anymore - my sister’s

vegetarian and she'd tell you worse than what Yvain said. There's no nutrition in meat, either: you don't even digest the iron well."

For a full fifteen minutes the Mayor was scolded by the Chief of Police and the citizen for eating poorly. At last, the Mayor shuddered as he realized the danger he had been in all those years, eating poorly as he did, and promised to throw out all the meat he had at home and never touch the stuff again. He got a vegetable sandwich instead, Yvain and the Chief of Police each got a bean burrito. After a quick meal, the three men then got in the nearest police car and headed off to Yvain's ranch.

On the way to Yvain's ranch, the Mayor explained everything that had happened to Yvain and the Chief of Police. "I think that the Army's rocket caused the hole in Yvain's fence and that — somehow, since I cannot think of any other cause — this led to the destruction of the town by my cattle. Cattle

do not spook without reason. Yes, I know that your cattle (which were nearer to the blast) were not spooked, yes I know that my cattle did not spook until hours afterward, but cattle are sometimes not as reasonable as we want them to be and sometimes the connections between events are obscure. I cannot prove it right now, but I know that the Army is, in fact, responsible. Yet this General will wiggle out of his responsibility if given the chance (even if we give him the rocket) and we must be able to present him with evidence that neither he nor the State can argue with."

Indeed, they looked and found Yvain's cow's footprints leading from Yvain's field through the valley, through the Mayor's field (and a sparrow's nest and some laughing crows) to Lionel's field. And sure enough, there was a rocket in the bottom of Yvain's hole.

What exactly happened remained unknown, but the connection was understood anyway.

When the Army came, they very carefully took the rocket out while all the townspeople watched, all the while saying things that troubled the townspeople like, “it’s really lucky it didn’t explode!” and “what a miracle!”

Nobody after that day troubled Yvain for destroying the town because it was learned it was the Mayor’s cattle—and that it wasn’t the Mayor’s fault because the cattle had gotten spooked by a rocket that had been blown off course in the season’s winds...and the Mayor had made the Army make things better than they were before.

Everyone knows that cattle don’t spook without reason, and can clearly see who is at fault in a mess (and who is responsible for fixing the problems at hand).

The War-Dog!



There is a story of a great warrior and his dog I heard long ago.

Together the man and dog laid siege to their enemy's castle and led a charge to the gates. The dog's master was slain, but the dog ran through the flames that encircled the fortress. Though the dog was badly burned, he did not waiver. The dog was pierced with arrows and did not slow. The dog reached the gate and crawled in through a hole, found and then killed his master's enemy. Covered in blood, the dog himself was killed where he stood over his master's enemy, bearing his teeth for the next challenge.

The dog never learned nor would have cared to learn that it was his master who unjustly started the war, or just how beautiful and gentle the King was that he killed. The dog neither loved his master nor his master's cause; the dog was a dog of war, and loved the chase.

Dogs of war are often like that because wars are often violent, senseless things—is it any wonder that the dogs that fight in them are senseless and violent too? Wars accomplish little—even if they are times for dogs and heroes to shine beautifully above the battlefield like the moon, giving their comrades hope in light as the darkest paths of the human heart are explored.

Wars allow each person to fantasize that they might be a hero, to hope they might gain more glory than what is commonly allotted to mortals. Wars stir within everyone hope than they might be the one to end war...and reap the glory that comes with the title, “Peacemaker.”

Wars cause us to forget that the glory shared is greater than the glory that is not, they blind us to the glory that is in each of us: we are all peacekeepers! Wars trick us to think that we must do glorious things to be glorious; we must be greater to be great at all.

Wars destroy dreams and love as speedily as they interrupt the harvest.

But, though wars interrupt the harvest, the harvest must still be taken in—even as love and dreams must still be held—if humanity will not die.

In these stories I write for you I do not willingly tell stories of war: the dreadful sacrifice of good creatures to such a hard god angers me. Do you not know I would speak other words? If I was not pressed by need, I would tell you of deep forests with many secrets, of beautiful ponds and lush marshes, of tree planters and lumberjacks, of farmers and chefs, of lands willing to bend to the weight of plows, of singers and ranchers, of the brave men and women who flew through the air on tornados and eagles and walked up to heaven on rainbows! No, such stories are not for while you picnic in the Kitchen, nor while you picnic in the wood. No, the god of war demands his due, and cannot be ignored.

Worship the god of War, and learn the lessons of martial discipline. The days of peace are over for a season, and the work of the moment demands great sacrifices. Panic and terror will fly upon your wings, Eros even now reaches for his bow, Victory her sword!

This is not the time for those stories of peace. When your belly is full and the sun is high, when you have things to do and are so busy you do not even have time to picnic in the places you prefer, you are not so easily tricked into thinking that death is to be feared, nor tricked so that you would forget the glory of your comrades who loved and dreamed as much as you. In the morning you must remember the coming night, in the evening you must remember the dawn. Only now will you see things as they are, and remember the darkest watches of the night without terror.

I shall tell you stories so you do not fear death, desire war, envy a hero or think peace

must be made. Love and Peace happen and are kept, War and Hatred must be made and ended. Now is the time to end hatred.

Let Love and Peace be your guides to tell you truth from lie when you are blinded in the dark because of Artemis's failed sentry. Yes, She will fail you...and Her Brother's faith she keeps. There is too often night without moonlight or starlight, when all the heavenly gods rest.

Trust you not to the heavenly gods: they have been false and treacherous before, and will be so again! Trust in Truth. Truth will rob the night of its darkness because the examination and testing Truth demands will shed a light stronger than Apollo's fury into the darkest places.



The Old Crow



There was a crow that woke up from a nap more stiff than he usually did. You see, he was a very old crow and, like many old animals, there came a day for him when he began to note not when he would wake up stiff, but when he would wake up more stiff than usual. This was that day for the crow.

On that day — and for every animal that has that day — there began a fear that he would not be able to go anywhere and therefore not be able to do anything because he'd be too stiff. He began to imagine that time was pressing him to do what he must and wanted to do, he began to distrust his hopes as being misleading and became dismayed at the challenge with which they presented him.

Well, this crow — from his earliest days — would marvel at the travels of the ducks and geese. In his earliest years, he would think of the adventures these birds would have and the places they would go and hope to go with

them. Lately, though, he had been thinking more of the warm places they would go to in the autumn than the adventures that they would have on their way — but still hoping to go with them.

Winters, it seemed, were getting colder. He wasn't sure if this was actually what was happening, or whether he was just more sensitive to the cold. But just the other day his nephew — who was a hardy crow, who was very strong and did not at all mind hardship or discomfort — had complained that the weather seemed to be changing for the worse. Why, he had even seen his nephew beat his wings at the noon hour to warm up! The old crow was settled on one point at least: he would bring up the question at the next meeting of the crows.

His band of crows met once every month at the full moon. Not at night, of course, but during the day of the full moon. “I think the days are getting colder; I think that though it

is winter, this winter is colder than the last. I think that we should go south like the ducks and geese to find the adventures that can be found in those warm lands our neighbors enjoy. I think that next month we should sleep beneath the southern stars and forget the cold winters we fled."

Some of the other crows cackled. The chief crow said, "you're old, friend! It is not as bad as you imagine it to be. Surely you remember your elders talking like that when you were young like us?" But the crow's nephew would not allow his uncle to be ignored. "He is old, and wiser than you. I, too, say it is colder, and I am stronger and hardier than you."

"But still," said the Chief crow, his feathers ruffled, "the ducks and geese come back every year in the summer. It might get too hot where they go. I do not want to make such a long journey twice: once there, once back when we find that it isn't so good."

Said another crow: “no, the ducks and geese are fatter than we are; they don’t like the heat or the cold: they like it cool and so they are always moving about to find just the right place.”

Said his wife: “and don’t forget that many geese and ducks don’t migrate! They stay here all year long at the pond because of the bread the people feed them! We are not ducks or geese. We need to go south and stay there.”

You can believe that the crows talked for a long time. That the winters were getting colder was a fear that all the crows felt, but none had the courage to speak about it until the old crow had given his opinion. By the time nightfall came, the crows were decided that, even if it weren’t getting colder, warmer places were nicer — if they were not too warm. It was decided that the ducks and geese should be talked to.

So, the next morning, the crows went to their cousins and it was true that they liked things cool and not cold, and that the places they would go to would not be too warm. This was much to the liking of the crows. The crows told their cousins that, if their cousins would have their company, the crows would join them this year in their travels. It was a simple thing for the ducks and geese to agree to: crows can be very good company.

So the crows came to the South, where it was warmer but never too warm (for crows) and there was more food than anyone could eat.

The next year the old crow was a year older. He was warmer now, but no less stiff; he was less afraid of the stiffness but no less cranky for it. At the full moon the crows gathered in a great oak tree by a pond.

The Chief crow would not be at peace. He was restless and wanted only to travel and see things. The old crow had enough of the

nomad life, though. “Go and see your horizons. Why should we all move from place to place now that there is no winter and no danger for a shortage of food? My wings are tired and old, and there are days it is all I can do to keep up while we fly from place to place.”

The Chief crow laughed. “Your wings are fine, old friend! It was you only last year that suggested we come to this fine land so far from home. We should move from place to place because it is how we have always lived and how we should always live. You must be brave, face life’s facts: you are afraid that you are old, and one day you will not be able to keep up. Be brave. You will one day be left behind as you left the graves of your father and mother behind.”

“I will not leave him behind: I tire of this traveling too!” cried the old crow’s nephew. “I can keep pace with anyone here, but I am tired of the constant traveling. This oak tree

in which we sit did not grow strong while moving from place to place. The old leaves fall and protect the roots. I miss the land of my ancestors, but eagerly await tending the new roots we have set here. Now that we are not pressed to move from place to place by winter's need we should not deprive the younger crows of the company and wisdom of the older crows. Or are some of us too wise, already?" The nephew beat his wings at the Chief and pecked at his neck. "Even a bird as unwise as me knows this is true! This is not only the way with plants but how our neighbors the raccoons do things and how our neighbors the people do things. Our neighbors prosper by this wisdom. I say it is how we should do things. The old must lead the young. I will stay with my uncle here. This is a good place. Let whoever will follow that fool," he gestured at the Chief, "find peace wherever they go."

Would you believe that almost all the other crows agreed? Soon they were treating the old crow like their Chief: asking him advice and to decide difficult things, asking him to go and see things and talk to neighbors on their behalf. The old crow became Chief. The previous Chief left with some of the other crows who would not be at rest. They never returned. It is said that together they founded a great nation of crows in a green valley far beyond the Snowy Mountains where there later came many cattle.

But the day came that the old crow could not leave his perch by the pond. He was too old. Did he stop being Chief? No. The crows came to him. They had no desire to go anywhere else or to anyone else. They brought him food, they brought him gold, they brought him the joy of the younger crows. The old crow no longer feared

waking up so stiff that he could not go anywhere. Where would he want to go?



The Debate
of the
Ants and the
Bees



In a large forest with many rivers, a family of beavers had built the largest dam there ever had been: it stretched four miles from bank to bank across a great pond. The family of beavers was as large as their dam: four generations of beavers lived and worked together in a village of lodges. The deafening sounds of the kits in the spring were testimony to the abundant wealth of the family.

All the animals of the forest used the dam as a bridge, and the beavers did not mind one bit. They even paved the top with mud and kept it level and free of debris. Some animals used the bridge to dive off of into the water, and others would even ask for and gain permission to build their homes upon the dam — if they promised to help care for the dam and the other animals that used it. And all the animals — whether they asked permission or not — benefited from the large pond that was created by the beaver's work.

Every year, though the beavers demanded no tax, the forest would give gifts to the beavers in gratitude for the dam-bridge. Though the beavers did not hold a levy, whenever the beavers were weakened by illness, enemies or lack of food, the other animals came to their aid however they were needed. The beavers rose to prominence, no decision was made without consulting the Eldest Beaver. This was how the beavers grew wealthy and were able to support so many kits, and why they spent their days largely in leisure: their tenants cared for the dam for them and the only work left for the beavers to do was to ensure that the dam-bridge was being maintained by the promises of the tenants.

One day, there came to the Eldest Beaver a Queen of the Ants. She entered the Eldest Beaver's lodge, flanked by sixteen large soldiers in full armor, two of whom carried her standards, four of whom carried small

trumpets to announce her. Following behind were various courtesans and servants. She and her soldiers bowed to the Eldest Beaver and explained that she came from the large Ant colony by the pond. She had just been sent away from her home with a guard of 30,000 soldiers and 100,000 workers to establish a new colony, and wanted the permission of the beavers to establish the colony on the bridge.

The Eldest Beaver had his reservations: wouldn't the ants get stepped on? How would this be safe for the ants? There was plenty of room, and he was more than glad to allow them as much space as they wanted (so long as they did not get in the way of the other tenants or animals that used the bridge).

The Queen laughed, and it was such a charming and beautiful laugh that the Eldest Beaver laughed too — how could he not help but fall in love with the young Queen?

“Don’t worry about that! We would build out your bridge so it would be wide enough to carry twice as much traffic, we would erect on either side pillars to enable the bridge to be drawn back in times of flood and replaced when the waters receded...and we would build a restaurant in the middle, where anyone could get anything they wanted to eat and not worry about the price. We would bring the strong beams of timber that grow in the darkest places of the forest, far from your pond.” She smiled and waved her antennae.

“All - *all* - would be taken care of, and the bridge would be better than when the ants first came.” The young Queen then commanded her Royal Architect to provide the Eldest Beaver with drawings of the plans.

How could the Eldest Beaver say no? He called all the beavers to his lodge and set the agreement of the ants before them. Unanimously, and to the great joy of the Queen, they approved the Queen’s proposal.

All the pond animals were called to the banks of the pond near the Eldest Beaver's lodge and the question was put to them: did they want the ants for neighbors? The answer was a resounding welcome for the Queen — complete with gifts, warm words and offers of assistance.

The ants made great promises, and great promises are sometimes difficult to keep. But within a year the ants had completed their construction. The ants and beavers grew fat from the gifts bestowed upon them by the forest. The beavers now had so little work to do — ensuring their tenants were keeping up the bridge did not take very much of their day — that they began to dream of elaborate wood works, constructions never previously attempted by beavers.

They built magnificent lodges, and when they lived comfortably enough, they set themselves to increasing the comfort of their fellow creatures. They made beautiful tables

and benches for the restaurant's patrons to sit upon. They built lounging chairs and talking chairs and the chairs you'd want for a good game of checkers. The beavers gained a reputation for excellent craftsmanship, and their work won them great renown.

One day there came a man to the Eldest Beaver. Because he could not fit in the Eldest Beaver's lodge, he was received outside on the shore of the beaver pond. He said he came from a great King who ruled all the forest. This King had heard of the prosperity of the beavers and demanded from the beavers a tax whose funds would be used for the betterment of the whole forest. For the betterment of the whole forest the beavers were required to pay it and, so, if they failed to pay the tax, they would be understood to be enemies of the forest and violators of the sacred trust that existed between a creature and their home. A quick and bloody war would be waged upon them

by all loyal subjects of the King. The beavers' dam would be broken, the pond would be drained. The beavers were citizens of the forest, they had an obligation to pay tax.

Well! The beavers wanted no war, but they would not pay an unjust tax. Taxation undertaken without representation amounts to little more than extortion and the rights of representation are not more limited under monarchies than under republics or democracies. The rights of Kings must be acknowledged by those whom they rule: a King, whether chosen by the gods of a people or by the people themselves, must earn their right daily through an obedient service to the common interest and an equally obedient service to Justice (or the other gods from whom they claim their right). Kings must serve before they are served.

The pond had never heard of the King before; they had no King and their gods

required no King for them. Was this King a prophet, bringing new gods to the pond? If so, these gods must be false ones to encourage their prophet to violent evil: those who rule by the sword die by the sword; those who rule by Justice live by Justice.

The King spoke of keeping obligations—was this like how the beavers ensured their tenants kept their promises? Not one of the creatures of the pond had asked the King to witness a promise, no one had promised anything to the King.

How did he claim the right to rule their pond? It was certainly not through an obedient service to the interests of the pond.

No, the Eldest Beaver could not pay the tax. The Eldest Beaver told the man to wait while he consulted with the other beavers and his tenants.

Then, because the man was a guest — albeit an unwelcome one — the Eldest Beaver made available to the man every comfort he

would want: food, water, blankets for the cold...whatever he desired he would get — so long as he would wait on the shore and not approach the bridge, the lodges or the meeting places of the animals. Once the man was comfortable, with the man's leave, the Eldest Beaver left him under the guard of a large horse who would safeguard the man's promise to not leave the spot: men who promise wars are not to be trusted to keep their other promises. Only men who rely upon the sword of justice and not their own may be trusted.

The Eldest Beaver called upon the Queen of the Bees. When she emerged from the hive, the Eldest Beaver bowed low before her, begging her to remember the kindnesses that he and his family had done for her and the pond, and asked that she require, in his name, all the animals to come to the shore opposite where the man waited — the only place large enough for such a

meeting — at sundown that night. The life of every creature of the pond depended upon their presence at the meeting. The Queen shook her head, “We bid you rise in Our presence: you are the Eldest Beaver, and We owe you Our life. Certainly you have at least the privilege of standing in Our presence! It makes Us sad that the beavers are distressed. May it soothe your heart that all you want We will to be done! Will you also accept some of Our honey? Its sweetness, when eaten, will allow you to remember the sweetness of life.” The Eldest Beaver graciously accepted the royal gift.

The bees were busy the whole day. Not one creature failed to receive the summons; not one creature failed to come. That night, the situation was explained and discussion began. None of the animals wanted war, but none could see any way to avoid war except by paying the tax. The General of the Queen Bee’s guard argued for defending the pond,

and slammed her spear against the ground in her wrath as she spoke: “I say we are mighty enough! Let the foolhardy King bring destruction upon himself and his people.” The bears were moved by the courage of the bees and promised that the pond would come to no harm while any one of their clan was left alive.

Other creatures began to make similar promises when the Queen of the Ants called for silence. Her Majesty’s General wished to speak: the General of the Ant’s Army did not like the idea of a defensive war that, even if it might destroy the King’s army, would certainly see the ruin of the pond as well. She had a better idea: send a Master to go quickly to the King and teach him two lessons.

The first lesson they would teach would be that the interests of the individual lie in the betterment of the whole—whether that individual wills it or not. No tax is required

to ensure that each individual cares for the forest!

This lesson of words would be followed by a lesson on the right and might of Kings: the strength of the whole forest was little to be reckoned against the strength of an individual — no matter how mighty a King he claimed to be! Those who threaten war are destroyed by war, those who seek to dominate the world are dominated by the world, and individuals that find their strength in armies find their strength is overestimated.

But who would be the animal to teach the lesson? Before anyone else could claim the honor, a spider stepped forward and kneeled before the Eldest Beaver. “If you please, Eldest, I will take this adventure: I swear that it is mine and no one else’s. It belongs to me and I claim it, you cannot rightfully keep it from me. I cannot fail in this undertaking because it is mine, no one else can achieve it because it is mine....but I am small, and will

take too long in getting to the King by myself.” Everyone praised the spider’s courage and wished to help the spider as much as possible. The horses volunteered to carry the spider, but the owls said they were quicker. The hawks said they were quicker than the owls, but could not fly at night. The Eldest Beaver settled the matter by saying speed *and* immediacy were the most important considerations. The owls were given the honor.

The Queen Bee asked for silence. Her General wished to speak again. “With all due respect to the courageous spider, the speedy owl, and the wise General of the Ants, the bees will warn the pond that preparations must still be made in case the spider or the owl fails,” cautioned the Bee General. This was good advice, so while the spider and the fastest owl prepared for the journey, the Bee General directed the fortifications of the pond.

While the other animals busied themselves following the Bee General's commands, the Eldest Beaver, the owl and the spider approached the man, and explained that they wished to speak with his King, personally. Where was the King?

The instant the man gave directions, the owl set off with the spider holding on to its talons. Over the forest they flew, over the river and over the hills. They flew very far that night and arrived at the King's castle the next morning. They flew right into the court, and in front of the King, who had just finished up breakfast. The owl announced the spider to the King, and the spider approached the King. Because it was difficult to hear the spider, the owl shouted out the spider's words.

The spider lectured on the obligations of the individual to the whole, and offered to prove the falsehood of the assertion that tax was required to ensure that the forest was

cared for. Tax might be required to do great things, levies might be needed to organize many individuals, but such taxes should be organized by those whom it will benefit. Taxation without representation should not be demanded of any creature: tax must be levied by representatives, or else, if levied by a King, the King must represent those levied and allocate the tax for the benefit of those levied.

The owl shouted, “the spider says she will prove it upon the bodies of any number of you who disagree with her that an individual is stronger than the whole, that the strong have an obligation to care for the weak, that the beavers care for the forest more than the King of People, and that the beavers need pay no tax. The Spider shall show whoever doubts her that the forest does not fear the King of People and his threats of war: those who threaten unjust war die by the sword of Justice. She now calls upon you, King of

People, to prove to her that we animals must pay tax; prove to her that you are her King and master! Bring her to submit to your will, if you can!”

The King stood and said he would gladly prove to the spider the necessity of paying tax, and that he needed none of his knights to do so: he could manage the spider — and the forest — alone. How many times had he gone hunting in deeper forests against greater animals than this spider? He bid his knights observe him prove that even as the strong were rightful governors of the weak, even as the Nobility were rightful Masters of the Commons, so too were people the rightful lords of beasts. He was the King of People and could subdue this spider and the pond!

The King picked up a legal document he was composing and rolled it into a weapon with which to smash the spider and approached the spider. As the King prepared to smash the spider, the spider

hopped onto the King's hand and crawled to his wrist. The spider bit the King. The King's hand released his papers as it went numb. Pain seared the King's arm as he lost feeling in it. He tried desperately to hit the spider with his uninjured hand, but could not manage to hit the spider because of the spasms that were shaking his body. Blinded and in pain, the King kneeled to the ground. He would have screamed had the poison not closed his throat. At last, the poison reached the King's heart and he died.

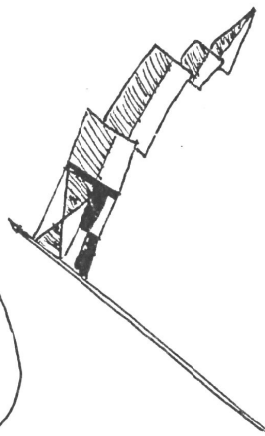
In the panic that followed, the spider ran to the owl. As the owl began to fly away, the people began throwing spears and shooting arrows. But the owl remained to circle the room and shouted for all to hear, "such has been and will forever be the fate of all tyrants! Do not attack our pond, do not demand any tax from us." The owl and spider then returned quickly to the pond, where they

were given great honors by the other creatures of the pond.

The animals maintained their fortifications for a long time, but never did any King or people attack the pond to collect a tax or enforce the will of their monarch.



the Peace
of the
Rooms and the
Crows



I once knew an old man who loved to look at the birds...though he hated the crows because of his love of the magpies. He hated the crows because this man, while looking at the birds, never once saw the raccoons hiding in the trees.

The raccoons had built nice nests in the hollows of the trees at the park...as their families had done for countless years before there was a park, for countless years before people walked among the trees.

The raccoons were the Kings and Queens, Princes and Princesses of the land of their parents, and all their subjects loved them. Under the raccoons' patient guidance, their forest (now a park) had prospered, and no one went hungry.

Though the Bird Watcher never saw the raccoons, he did see how one day that crows came to the forest. Where they had come from the Bird Watcher did not know: he

didn't take time to talk with the birds he watched.

Upon entering the forest, the crows asked the first animal they came across for food and shelter: they had traveled very far and were weak from the journey. As it happened, they found a mother skunk showing her children what was good to eat; it was little more effort to show the crows what was good to eat, and make some extra room in the den for them.

Over dinner, the crows thanked their hosts. Isn't it strange that some places, it is a great discourtesy to thank one's host, and in others it is an expected politeness? Where the crows were from and where they were traveling, it was the expected politeness and the skunk was pleased to be hosting such refined guests: and even more pleased by the fine gifts from far away that the crows had brought.

Thanks turned into talk, talk turned into friendship and the crows inquired if there

was room for them to live in the mother skunk's forest. "I'm sure there is, but it is not our forest. This forest is subject to the raccoons, and their good lordship has made everyone who lives here content. If there is a space, they will find you the best there is to offer—if you ask them politely. I will introduce you to the raccoons tomorrow morning."

You might imagine the surprise of the Bird Watcher, had he seen the crows exit a skunk's nest in the morning. But this Bird Watcher, unlike a good watcher, was not awake and watching at dawn.

The crows, as the customs of their land dictated, brought to the raccoons gifts of the things they found on their journey. The skunk took them to the tree where the raccoons held court. High in the branches, kneeling before the raccoons, the crows honored them with kind words of praise. The eldest raccoon thanked them and asked

who they were and from where they had come, why they had come and what they most desired of the raccoons, “for We will make all efforts to be useful servants to such polite guests as you.”

The crows bowed again and explained that they came from the desert, and had followed a beautiful road to the mountains. They had crossed the mountains and the valleys, and found a great river that was forever clothed in green trees. They left the green trees to see what lay beyond the rolling hills and so came to the ocean. In all their travels, never before had they found such a pleasant forest as the one that belonged to the raccoons, and desired to live in peace in the forest.

As for why they left the desert, well...the crows bowed their heads in shame. Their lands had been conquered by an enemy tribe of crows, and there was nothing they could

do to halt the invasion. “They were so much more numerous.”

The raccoons reminded them not to be ashamed of their weaknesses, but to be proud of their honor. “And what is it that you most desire?”

The crows were dismayed they had to be asked twice the same question, they only reluctantly answered. “You lands are very pleasant, and we want to live here very much; but it would be a lie to say anything but that we most desire our own lands back.”

“It is a very simple thing, then!” said the eldest raccoon, clapping her hands in delight. “In Our forest we have a law that if anyone wishes to live among Us, We will give them what they most desire (so long as it is not an unreasonable or odious thing to ask). Regaining you your lands is hardly a difficult job, even though it is a great distance away. Tomorrow you will lead all Our army that can fly to your lands and we will retake them

for you; you will not hold your lands from Us, they will be yours freely. We would give you all Our army, but the distance is too great for those who cannot fly to walk. Only once you have your lands back may you may live among Us. We will give you the great oak by the pond for your home, if you want it.”

The captain of the army was called and told to arm all the flying army for an expedition. The crows were speechless, but managed to express their gratitude by bowing low before the raccoons.

And this is how the sergeant of the raccoon’s flying army, a magpie, first saw the crows. How could the sergeant doubt that the crows and he were serving the same master? The sergeant approached the raccoons and also bowed, and informed the raccoons his captain had already told him everything he needed to know and was only requiring an introduction to the crows.

The formal introduction was made, and the sergeant was told to obey all that the crows would command, to free the crows' lands from those occupying it by force and to return home victorious as quickly as possible: "the sooner you return, the sooner you will have the thanks of your forest."

And so the army of birds set forth, singing beautifully, banners carried high above their wings. There were the magpies, proud and strong! There were the bright sparrows and doughty tits, the meadowlarks with their long red banners, the seagulls with their three blue crosses upon the green field! The hawks and the eagles, the falcons and the kestrels! Every bird in the forest flew forth, even if only in a guard of honor. It is a pity the birdwatcher was unable to see the sight (he was talking with another bird watcher at the time over coffee at his house).

As soon as the army left the forest, the crows advised their borrowed army to hide

their colors and cease their singing: they would encounter less trouble this way, and perhaps better surprise their enemies. The sergeant only replied that “we will do as you command, but we fear no encounter and would advise against a surprise attack: it is neither kind nor honorable.”

“Kind? Why would we be kind to our enemies?”

Over the days it took to travel the distance, the crows learned much from their borrowed army. The crows learned so much about how to respect their enemy from their army that, when they flew into their desert home with banners and songs high, they did not even attack at once the first enemy crow they saw. Instead, they flew to the chief enemy crow’s camp and talked with her for many hours. At the end of the meeting, the enemies understood that they would be sorely pressed to defend the land that was not theirs and left without a fight.

Can you imagine the joy of the crows at having gained back their lands without battle? The crows loved their loaned army and the raccoons greatly, and wished only to know how best to thank them. So, after asking their teacher the magpie, on behalf of the raccoons, the magpie drafted and signed treaties of friendship with the crows. Then gifts were exchanged, and the borrowed army given places to call their home in the lands of the crows.

As soon as things were set back in order in the crows' lands (things that were broken by the enemies had to be repaired, power and lands had to be restored to those whom they were taken from, and other business that inevitably requires immediate attention after an occupation had to be done), the crows said goodbye to their subjects for a little while: the crows were leaving to go thank the raccoons and return their borrowed army. The crows packed fine gifts and then left.

The flight back was no less rushed than the flight from the raccoons' lands, so eager were they to arrive. But when they arrived! The enemy crows that they had expelled were laying siege to the raccoons' forest.

Not expecting to be encountered from their rear, the enemy crows were entirely unprepared for the raccoon's flying army. This time, there was much less talk at the chief enemy crow's tent: because they had been warned not to cause any more trouble, the enemy crows feared they would be not given further mercy (and it isn't a wonder that those who do not give mercy do not expect mercy).

As the magpie and the crows approached the enemy crow's tent with a white flag, they were assailed by stones and arrows. There and then the magpie fell, killed by a stone that crushed him despite his armor. The battle that ensued was terrible, but short: as soon as the raccoons saw their army to the

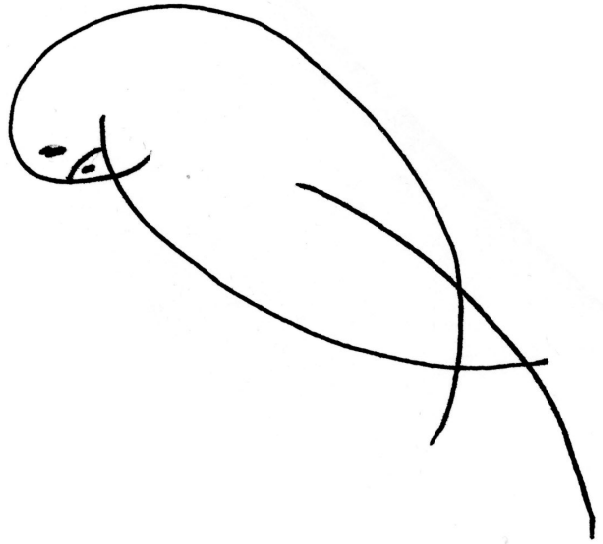
rear of the enemy crows and that the enemy crows would not negotiate a peace, they rushed out of their forest and the enemy crows were unable to withstand the attack on two sides.

The crows and the raccoons lived in peace ever after, and would always come quickly should the other require anything of them. Together they buried the magpie where he fell, and wrapped his body in bright colors.

As for the birder? He sometimes would wonder where a magnificent magpie he used to like looking at had gone to, and often hypothesized the magpie had gone to live somewhere else, and it was the crows who pushed the magpie from his home. It was beyond his ability to see there was power greater than the crows, or that the magpie and the crows kneeled to the same master. How could he have faith in the good nature of crows?



APICNIC
by the
Shore →



There was a penguin who flew north to Florida for a vacation. He wanted to see flowers, and was told that Florida was the best place to see them.

When he arrived in the Keys, he was introduced to a parrot who knew where all the best flowers were. They had been writing to each other for some weeks before hand, and were glad to finally meet.

“Let’s go see some flowers!” the penguin suggested.

“We will, we will,” assured the parrot, “but you just arrived and should rest up. It’s a hard journey to see the best ones – if you can’t fly. You’ve probably sat and laid still long enough – do you like to bowl?”

Well, sooner than the penguin could answer to the affirmative, they were off bowling. It was bowling league night and the parrot played with the flamingos’ team. Tonight they were playing against the opossums and everyone was excited – it

would be a challenging game, the opossums were best in the league. Of course, the penguin would be welcome – they had heard what a good bowler he was.

But, even though the penguin bowled a perfect game – all strikes – the flamingos and parrot lost by a single point. “That was a close game,” they all agreed.

The opossums won the choice of where to eat, and they loved the Crab’s Sandwich Shack, so away they went.

Before the food arrived, the rain began. “Ah, wonderful!” the crab clicked his pincers. “Rain!”

The crab rushed out of the room and returned with buckets. “Time for rain tea!” The crab rushed up and down the beach, putting the buckets ever few feet apart and, quickly, they began to fill with rain. He stood to watch them a moment, occasionally wiping the water from his eyes, and when they were full he pulled them inside and poured their

contents into glasses set all about the fire. He then put a tea bag into each glass and let it brew by the embers.

The penguin came over to watch. The crab, without stopping his work, turned an eye to the penguin. "See, rain tea is better than sun tea," the crab explained as he worked. "Usually all we have is sun tea, so I have to make rain tea when I can."

The Penguin nodded appreciatively, remembering the snow tea of home.

"How did you like your fennel funnel cake?" the crab asked.

The penguin tried, but could not lie. "I'm sorry, but it was horrible. It was so disgusting I gave it to the cockroaches begging at the door, but they threw it into the ocean. I don't think the fish have even touched it."

"Yeah, I know. That's why they're free and the sandwiches aren't. My brother makes them. I hate them as much as any of

the customers, but there's no telling him so. All the customers will nibble them politely when he comes by to see how they're liking his cakes, but then throw them out. See, the trash is where they belonged in the first place."

Before the penguin could ask why everyone didn't just confront the crab's brother about the truth, into the door walked some very wet and smelly goats, glad to get out of the rain. "Excuse me," the crab said as he sat them at a table near the door and largest window, which he opened despite the rain.

When the crab put a complimentary plate of fennel funnel cakes before them, the goats ate them up! "Those are GREAT!" they complimented the crab. "We'll order another plate. How much do they cost?"

The crab was initially shocked, but mastered himself in time. "Believe me, Goat, they're free. And if you want more,

you can have as many as you like. Do you have family that would like some too?" before the goats knew what was happening, an entire basket was loaded and waiting for them to take home. "Gosh, thanks!" was all they could say to the crab's generosity.

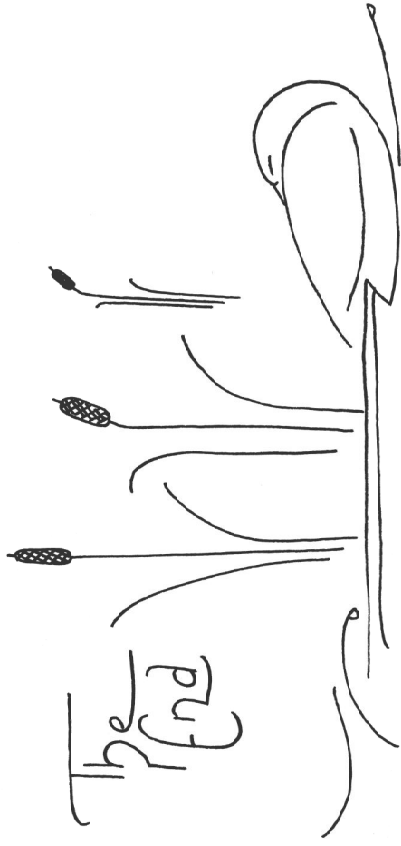
Soon all the customers were offering the goats their cakes, but the goats were full. "What a nice place, full of nice creatures!" the goats remarked as they left when the rain stopped. "We'll be back!"

The Penguin also decided he'd be back.

As the penguin came back over the months of his visit to rest up between flower hunting journeys into the swamp, he saw that more and more goats came to the crab's sandwich shack, and soon there weren't enough fennel funnel cakes. The crab's brother was working full time just to keep up! More crabs were hired. More goats came.

Thank goodness the quality of the sandwiches never failed.





Everyone receives what they need
At their time of need
All that is unmade
Can be remade