

THE **A**NIMALS' **B**EAUTY **C**ONTEST

The animals decided to hold a beauty contest for the Most Beautiful Animal in the World. Needless to say, there was much excitement over who would win — and much intense competition for the crown. After all, who wouldn't want to be Miss Beast?

A stage made of dirt was erected by the apes, complete with a runway, trampled into place by the zebras. Lighting was provided by the fireflies and the early moon. The day animals complained that the contest was to be held at night, and the night animals complained that it wasn't being held late enough. They compromised on “just after sunset,” when the sky would be brilliant with color.

Only one representative from each species would be allowed to compete, and that representative had to be selected by the members of that species. You can imagine the wrangling that went on.

The rules also said that no artificial means could be used to enhance the natural appearance of anyone who entered the contest, but there were many accusations — from false eyelashes on the giraffes, to extra spots on the leopards, to steroid use by the dwarf lemurs.

The judges were to be Tarzan and Jane, an elderly, arthritic human couple who still had good eyesight, although their hearing was going. Anyone caught trying to bribe the

judges would be devoured. Lobbying was likewise discouraged, but it was rumored that a red fox took Tarzan and Jane out to dinner. They all denied it.

There would be a Talent Competition and a Beauty Parade, followed by a Question-and-Answer Period.

First up in Talent was Miss Jaguar, who showed how she lurked in undergrowth and sprang on passersby. She was a big hit with the felines and even some of the other species, but she was heavily booed by the springboks and the hooved in general.

Miss Orangutan swung from a nearby tree branch by one hand and distended her lips in various ways, causing a heated discussion of whether she was talented or obscene, but they had many other animals to get through and so she was not disqualified.

There were of course many more who demonstrated their talents: those with fur and those with feathers, those wearing hides and those without, the large, the small, and the in-between, the no-legged and the multi-legged. The clearing rang out with an amazing assortment of sounds from the mouths and other body parts of the would-be winners. Near the end of the Talent Competition Miss Unicorn was disqualified because she couldn't prove that she was a real animal even though she sang "Feelings" very nicely. She pointed out that centipedes and some of the others weren't animals either, but she was outvoted.

Eventually, the field was narrowed down by Tarzan and Jane to five finalists, though the species who were excluded from this list made their anger and disgust manifest. For instance, the gorillas walked out en masse, and the cassowaries threatened to leave dung on the stage and were dissuaded only at the last second.

Somehow the five finalists gathered for the Beauty Contest. And they were the following: Miss Kangaroo, Miss Hyena, Miss Parrot, Miss Scorpion, and Miss Feral Pig.

During the Pageant section all the contests displayed their many charms to the

remaining members of the audience. Miss Kangaroo showed her pouch and incorporated a stunning hop into her stroll down the runway. Miss Hyena certainly didn't have the best posture, but she more than made up for it with a reprise of the amazing laugh and scowl that had gotten her this far. Miss Parrot was somewhat insensitive in trying to eat Miss Scorpion while talking about the cracker she wanted, but Miss Scorpion held her own and stung both Miss Parrot and Miss Feral Pig. "Let's see anybody beat this tail!" Miss Scorpion said, waving it around. Happily the stings were only superficial. Miss Feral Pig brought down the house with a special trick with a truffle using an unusual part of her anatomy. Some said this trick should have been shown in the Talent Competition and clearly not during the Beauty Pageant. Nevertheless, Miss Feral Pig seemed to be the clear leader as it neared time for the Question-and-Answer period.

The first question, asked by Jane, was "Why do you want to be Miss Beast?"

"I don't care if I win or not," said Miss Kangaroo. "I'm just pleased that I was able to hop for all you people out there. I just want to hop till I drop."

She hopped back in line.

"You never give any prizes to us!" cried Miss Hyena, making the fiercest face you'd ever want to see, fangs bared, spittle flying. "Why don't *we* ever win? Why? *Why?*"

She slunk back in line.

"And why do you want to be Miss Beast?" Jane asked Miss Parrot.

"And why do you want to be Miss Beast?" was the answer.

When Jane asked the question again, Miss Parrot said, "And why do you want to be Miss Beast?"

Some thought she was avoiding the question, while others found her answer deeply philosophical.

Miss Scorpion's answer was "Shut up!" And she tried to sting Jane, but she was temporarily out of venom.

"I just want to win so that I can raise scholarships for underprivileged ferals everywhere," said — that's right — Miss Feral Pig.

But then came the second — the more challenging — question, this time asked by Tarzan, who still looked good in his loincloth although his belly hung over it a bit.

This was the second question:

"If it turns out that you don't happen to win the title of Miss Beast for yourself, who would you say is the most deserving other animal?"

This brought an in-take of breath from the assembled. "That's a very difficult question!" seemed to be the consensus. The contestants were given a minute to collect their thoughts before they stepped forward.

"Okay," Tarzan said, "Miss Kangaroo, what is your answer?"

"Well, if I can't be Miss Beast, then I think the crown should go to . . . somebody else!" Miss Kangaroo gave a great big dopey smile and went back upstage.

There was rather tepid applause.

Then Miss Hyena crept forward. "If I can't be Miss Beast, then nobody should be! You hate us! You hate hyenas! Admit it! Admit it! We never win! *Ever?*"

Security, provided by the tigers and the dingoes, managed to force Miss Hyena back into line, although she was still snarling, saliva everywhere.

"And what about you, Miss Parrot — if you can't win the crown, who do you think should? Tell me and my lovely wife, Jane."

Miss Parrot looked around. "I think you and your lovely wife, Jane, should win if I can't," she told Tarzan.

“What a terrific answer!” Tarzan said. And Jane seemed to think it a good one too, though it made her blush.

The other animals yelled, “The judges can’t win! The humans always win! No fair!”

The uproar continued until both Jane and Tarzan disqualified themselves.

Miss Scorpion said, “If I can’t win, I will simply try again next year. I will work very hard on my venom and hope that next time you will all find me irresistible.”

The crowd liked her spirit of dedication, and few seemed to notice that she hadn’t really answered the question.

Last up was Miss Feral Pig, who had smeared some dirt on her eyelids and kept batting them at Tarzan and the crowd.

“She’s enhanced herself!” someone shouted.

This was followed by a hurried conference with the judges and two owls about whether dirt on feral pigs was natural or not.

It was finally decided that she could keep her eye make-up.

“And what is your answer?” Tarzan continued. “If it should happen that you can’t yourself be Miss Beast, who do you think should be here in your place?”

Miss Feral Pig pondered the question as if she were hearing it for the first time. She looked at the audience. She looked back at the other contestants and noticed that Miss Hyena was absolutely livid, her body shaking with rage. Off to the side were thirteen more hyenas, waiting by the side of the stage, hunched and snarling, lips curled, fangs out. Then Miss Feral Pig said, taking in the situation, “If I can’t win, I believe that Miss Hyena should. After all, she has had far more to overcome than any of the rest of us. She is the most talented, the most beautiful, and she answered the questions the best. Not to give the title to her would be a disgrace and an outrage, yet one more illustration of the unfairness with

which our hyena relatives have long been treated.”

There was wild applause from everyone, led by the snarling hyenas. “Give it to me!”
cried Miss Hyena, overcome with tears. “Me! Me! Give it to *me!*”

Guess who won the title of Miss Beast?

THE **B**ILLYGOAT

Billy Goat had two ears, four hooves, and a little beard. He ate grass and weeds and cans. He was a stereotypical goat.

“I will break free of these limitations put upon me by society and be someone to reckon with!” said Billy.

He went off to join the circus. “I can do trapeze work,” he said. But the manager, a hard-headed businessman who had to put butts on seats, said, after he had watched Billy on the trapeze, “Sorry, I don’t think you can pull them in. Nice concept, just doesn’t work.”

“Screw you!” Billy said, butting the circus manager in, yes, the butt.

“I will become a respected novelist!” proclaimed Billy.

He ripped up some paper and chewed it until it was pulp, then stomped on it with his hooves until it was flat. Then he peed a book on it.

He managed to get an agent, but the agent was unsuccessful at selling the book to a large corporate-owned publishing company. “It’s too literary!” said the editorial boards.

“Fuck you!” said Billy, growing increasingly frustrated. He would have butted the editorial boards, but they were bought up by large conglomerates and had ceased to exist.

“I have it!” said Billy. “I will become an exotic dancer!”

He bought himself a chiffon scarf and draped it over his hide quarters. “I will make

them yelp and beg for a glimpse of my goatish charms. I will become rich and famous.”

He got a gig at a seedy downtown club and rehearsed some numbers with a cheap rehearsal pianist named Snuffy. They thought maybe they had something. They opened.

But he was arrested by the Vice Squad and sent to a slaughterhouse.

“No, not that!” Billy cried.

“I can offer you a deal instead,” said the manager of the slaughterhouse.

“What? Anything!” Billy was growing up.

Billy Goat lived for a long time and made a nice living leading cattle down a long runway before he himself turned off — and they didn’t.

Moral: If you can’t be Jesus, you may have to be Judas.

THE **C**AT AND THE **M**OUSE

“I just want to be your friend,” said Pussy. She looked most sincere, her yellow eyes the very picture of friendliness. She was lying outside Millie Mouse’s home, which was a hole in the wall of a condo in San Francisco.

“Oh, I don’t think so,” said Millie Mouse. “I’ve heard that you want to eat mice.”

Pussy’s eyes narrowed, her dark, luxurious fur quivering on her back. “How can you say such a thing! It’s not true.” Millie kept her distance. She had new babies to look after, tucked away in some shredded newspaper in the back. She was a single mother now, her husband having gone out one day and never having returned.

“Just come out for a minute or two,” said Pussy. “We can romp together. It will be great fun. I promise. You can ride on my back.”

Millie Mouse moved a step closer to the opening. Pussy looked very big but also very friendly. Her tail was snapping back and forth. A chill ran down Millie’s back. She couldn’t quite put a name to it, but she sensed a problem with Pussy. “I think I will stay inside,” said she.

“But why?” cried Pussy. “Just because I’m a cat you don’t think I would . . . ?”

“I’ve heard rumors, and they weren’t very complimentary.”

“Rumors? What sort of rumors?”

“Of cats catching mice and dispatching them.”

“That’s a lie. We’re not all the same! I’m surprised at you, Millie, for falling for such nonsense. Surely you aren’t stereotyping me!”

Millie felt a wave of guilt wash over her. What if she was wrong? She might miss out on a fine romp, a ride on Pussy’s back, and possibly even a new friend. All because she had failed to take into consideration Pussy’s individuality. She had attended a sensitivity Training Session on just such matters a few weeks earlier at the Mice for Ralph Nader Meeting in Berkeley.

Millie crept closer to the opening. “How do I know that you won’t eat me? You’re so much bigger than I am,” said she.

“How will the world ever get better if we creatures don’t learn to trust each other,” Pussy offered. “Calling each other names and thinking the worst of others is the cause of most of the world’s problems. I’m just lonely and rather unhappy living here in this condo without much to do. I can’t read, and the owner won’t let me out. He’s not here half the time, and when he is he just strokes me a little bit and then goes to sleep. I sleep too much myself, and it’s making me lose the energy and drive I had as a kitten, which wasn’t that long ago! Please, Millie, throw off the old prejudices and categorizing and let’s start a brand new world in which cats and mice can live together in harmony and peace!” Pussy held out her paw in the most pitiful of manners.

Millie hesitated slightly. “So you swear then that you won’t eat me if I come out there?”

“On my mother’s grave!” declared Pussy.

“I’m so sorry I ever doubted you. It was small-minded and petty and terribly, terribly wrong of me to misjudge you. Can you ever forgive me?” Millie drew a big breath

and scampered through the hole toward the waiting cat.

Pussy kept her promise. She didn't eat Millie Mouse. She just bit her and batted her around until she was dead and left the body for Millie's babies to find.

Moral: Modern children's P. C. books are crap.

THE CROWS

At the zoo Lena the Lioness was missing her studded collar. And Edie the Indian Elephant looked everywhere for her anklet and could not find it. Indeed there was hardly an animal in the entire zoo who hadn't had something disappear from its possession.

"I've lost two curls!" baaed Simon the Big-Horned Sheep.

"My ants are completely gone," said Andy the Anteater.

They all started such a commotion that when the male human zoo keeper came he could barely understand what they were saying. Nevertheless, he questioned them one by one. No, they hadn't been out of their individual exhibits and cages — well, maybe they had, but only to sleep in their sleeping quarters. The zoo keeper checked each and every animal's area. They had been picked clean of every piece of jewelry or prized collectible. Even Kenny the Kangaroo had had his pouch pick-pocketed.

"You're either all becoming very forgetful," the zoo keeper said, "or there are thieves about."

"Thieves?" cried the animals, shaking. "No! Not thieves!"

"Who would want to rob us?" said the last of the Dodos. "We're such nice creatures and we're all in this zoo together."

The zoo keeper heard more tales of woe and checked more of the grounds and

found nothing, until at last he noticed the crows' rookery, complete with its rocks and bare trees, in the distance. He thought he could even make out some glittering items inside a nook at the top. When he got there, the crows themselves wouldn't talk to him. They sat on their tree limbs as surly as could be, hunched over. "Well, it's the crows of course!" the zoo keeper said aloud to himself. The crows just gave him the eye.

He went back to the other animals. "I think I know who did it," he announced.

"Oh, good!" everyone exclaimed.

"Yes, I so want to get back my earring," said Vilma the Wild Boar.

"Who is this terrible culprit?" demanded Wilbur the Wolverine.

"I think it's the *crows*," the zoo keeper said. "Or some of them."

The faces of all the animals blanched. "Oh, it can't be them!" they objected.

"Surely not!"

"But I saw shining objects at their rookery. I will get a warrant and examine their stockpile. Then I will make some arrests."

"Oh, it can't be the crows!" the animals cried out yet again. "Oh, no, it can't be them!"

A crow flew overhead just then and screamed, "It's always us! It's always us you blame! Most of us never do anything wrong, and yet you always arrest us!" And off he flew and settled back onto a bare tree branch at the rookery. The other crows were equally raucous, furiously strutting up and down on their tree limbs.

"So very true," said the Last of the Dodos.

"But I saw what looked like booty at the rookery!" the zoo keeper insisted. "I think they must be your stolen things."

The animals looked at each other and shook their heads.

“At least let me check out the rookery,” the zoo keeper said.

The animals looked over toward the crows, who were still kicking up a terrible fuss. If anything, they were even noisier now.

“I can go over there and see what’s what,” said the zoo keeper. “Before they have a chance to get rid of the stolen booty.”

“No, you’ll just have to keep on looking,” the animals finally said, as they turned shamefaced and silent.

Moral: You can’t have Species Profiling, you see.

THE **E**AGLE AND HER **C**HICKS

On the day they were born, the old mother eagle, knowing this was her last clutch, named her chicks Faith, Hope, and Charity. She loved them, but she feared for them in their aerie atop a tall tree.

The two stronger youngsters gobbled up every single scrap of food their mother, alone in her old age, brought to the nest. Thus Charity, the weakest chick, gave way and was pushed to the rear by the other two, and soon withered and died.

The mother eagle next watched as Faith ventured out onto the edge of the nest to test her wings. She flapped them a dozen times and then a dozen more. A serpent lurking on the tree took the opportunity and dispatched Faith with a sting, grabbed her, and slithered off. The mother eagle was not as agile as she had once been and so was unable to assist her second offspring.

That left only Hope, who hovered in the rear of the nest, losing her down and growing in size but chastened by what had happened to her siblings. The mother eagle saw that her remaining child was becoming tentative and afraid, would not even test its wings. So the mother eagle, being wise, pecked out the eyes of her last child and set it on the rim of the nest and gave it a hard nudge. Off the last child flew.

Moral: Hope is the last to go, and of course, to have any chance of succeeding, it must be blind.

THE **E**LEPHANT AND THE **A**NT

One day an ant stepped on an elephant.

One day an elephant stepped on an ant.

Moral: Be big.

THE **F**ERAL **C**AT AND THE **P**ITBULL

Michelle the cat lived under the Office of Equal Opportunity building on a community college campus with the other feral cats, four in all. Michelle had been conceived by a passing tom out of her one-eyed mother, a calico. From birth she'd had a lame leg, but she also had a cute face and a yellow tuft on the end of her cute tail.

Michelle, of course, wasn't her real name. It was the name given her by the Cat Lady on the campus who fed the feral cats.

One day the building which the ferals lived under was condemned, to make way for a newer OEO building, so the ferals had to be gotten to the other side of campus. The Cat Lady held watch for twenty-four straight hours until all the cats made it out safely and scampered away. Because they were ferals they distrusted human beings and wouldn't come near them, even the Cat Lady. Nevertheless, Michelle and the others hungrily gobbled up the wet and dry food that the Cat Lady put out for them day after day, if she kept her distance. She got them a new place to live by moving food closer and closer to another suitable building for the ferals to live beneath.

They eventually all made it there. Several new ones, from somewhere or other, joined the first four.

Some months later a brown pit-bull roamed onto the campus. It had escaped from

someone's backyard. It was just an ordinary pit-bull with a strong, sturdy body, big face, and a mean streak if you weren't its owner.

The pit-bull saw Michelle out sunning herself and gave chase. It wasn't even something Michelle had said to the pit-bull.

Michelle crawled into her safe spot under the new building and up behind some loose wooden planks. The other ferals were there in their spots, dozing and sleeping.

The pit-bull had some trouble wiggling under the building, but it managed to do so. It saw the other ferals and thought about going after them. Then it remembered Michelle and leapt at the loose boards and pulled them off with hardly any trouble at all.

Michelle hissed and got up as far as she could in her safe spot. However, the pit-bull jumped up several times and pulled her down and began to savage her yellow body with his hard, strong teeth. The other ferals ran away.

The pit-bull carried Michelle across the campus in his mouth. She was still alive and struggling. If she scratched him, the pit-bull didn't seem to notice.

Behind a classroom building, among the stinky, dried-out weeds, the pit-bull finished off Michelle with several particularly vicious attacks on her head. Then he left what was left of her there and went somewhere else.

Moral: Anyone can become Miss America if you just dream big enough.

THE **F**LY AND **B**ULLFROG

Freddie the Fly was born one day in a pile of cow dung. At first he was white and wriggly, but then he turned black and brown. He had numerous eyes and legs plus an in-built buzzer. “You will see the world,” said Freddie’s mother, who, alas, was an unwed mother and hence unable to care for her large brood. “I must send you all off now,” she said. “Be good flies. Say your prayers and always behave yourselves. Goodbye now and best of luck.” She gave each one a kiss, and off they flew.

Freddie was ready for anything. He looked up at the heavens and soared so high he could barely breathe. Then he skirted along the ground, making loud satisfied noises with his buzzer. Oh my, there were flowers! There were bushes! There were other bugs — all of these to be explored, again and again, and so Freddie darted hither and yon, yon and hither. Every once in a while he would come to rest in — best of all — some manure or garbage! He feasted for fourteen minutes on the carcass of a dead hedgehog that had been hit by a car.

“How is it?” another fly asked him, settling in beside Freddie.

“Indescribably delicious!” Freddie replied, buzzing off to new adventures.

There was nothing Freddie did not enjoy on that day of his birth — the sun when it grew warm, the cool shade under a tree for a snooze. But night began to approach, and

Freddie wondered where he would spend the cold night. Perhaps I could sleep in that barn over there, he told himself. Or perhaps between the stacks of hay that are lying in that field.

Suddenly Freddie spotted a pond not too far away. No, I'd better hurry over there, he thought, because the sun is declining and I must find a bed for the evening. He had noticed a broad leaf floating on the pond. Yes, I will go there and make that my bed. A bed on my very own yacht! thought Freddie.

Benny the Bullfrog was sitting on the edge of the pond, up to his bulging eyes in water, his bulbous green back barely showing, as darkness slowly descended. Benny had a deep voice that carried clear across the pond whenever he wanted it to. Any number of lovely girl frogs had surrendered to his charms. Tonight, however, he was quiet, watching the blue tits and the night swallows flying over the water chasing insects.

Benny was just about to wish he could fly too when he caught sight of a broad leaf floating past him.

“This is the life!” said Freddie the Fly, sailing the pond in his yacht.

Did I mention that Benny the Bullfrog had a long, sticky tongue?

THE **G**OLDEN **R**ETRIEVER AND THE **S**POTTED **H**YENA

A golden retriever who lived in a big, beautiful house with some humans was chasing his tail in a nearby meadow one day. Around and around he went, delighted with the game. Then he jumped into the air and caught a tennis ball that he himself had tossed there with his teeth. What fun! he thought. His tongue hung out, red and juicy.

A short distance away, the golden retriever's two pups were playing with each other among the dandelions, pretending to bite each other and tumbling and falling over each other. My children are as cute as they can be, thought the golden retriever. Life is good, and I love all mammal-kind!

Nearby behind a hedge a spotted hyena was watching the two pups. What a nice lunch they would make, she thought. How can I get them away from their dopey father? She rubbed her large, sharp fangs on her paws, her mouth salivating with expectation. Maybe I should call my family and do an ambush, she thought. But these pups are so small I can probably handle this myself. She crouched in the meadow grass and waited.

“What’s that over there, Daddy?” asked the older of the two golden retriever pups, looking in the direction of the hyena.

“Where?” the adult dog said.

“There’s something in the grass behind the hedge.”

“It’s a hyena!” said the other pup.

“No, we don’t have hyenas in this neck of the woods,” said the father.

“Really?” said the older one.

“Is that who ate Mommy?” said the younger one.

“Now, now, that was never proven. We mustn’t talk badly about the oppressed,” the father said.

“Are hyenas oppressed?” asked the other pup, looking off toward what was moving in the grass.

“Yes, they have been given a bad reputation just because they are ugly and hunch their backs when they walk. But we don’t have any of them around here.”

“Hunching like that one is doing right now?” asked the older pup. “It looks pretty scary, Daddy.”

“You mustn’t judge anyone by their physical appearance,” cautioned the father. “Never judge anyone until you have walked a mile in their moccasins. And then and only then be very slow to judge and quick to forgive. And you will grow up to be a strong, kind, good dog just like me.”

“Will we chase our tails just like you?”

“You bet!”

“Why is that non-hyena crawling on its belly in our direction, Daddy?” asked the smaller of the two pups.

“It’s just trying to look cute so that somebody will throw it a ball,” explained the father. “It’s just a dog at heart like us.”

“Are you sure it doesn’t want to do more than that? Isn’t it a little closer now, Daddy?”

“I don’t want you to grow up narrow-minded and xenophobic,” said the father.

“Love all mammal-kind and you will be a better dog when you grow up.”

“I wish it would go away, Daddy. I don’t like it,” said the younger pup.

“We can all learn to live together. There’s plenty of room.” The dog gestured with his muzzle at the meadow and the woods. “The hyena, or whatever it is, will stay in its place, and we will stay here in ours.”

“I’m getting hungry, Daddy,” said the younger pup. “I want some food!”

“You forgot to say ‘please,’” the father reminded the pup.

“Can we go into the house for lunch today?” asked the other one. “Will Jeremy open some cans of food for us again? Huh, huh?”

“Oh, I’m sure he will. He always does.” The father licked his pups about the chin, and they jumped up and down, their golden ears flapping.

They turned toward the lovely big house just over the rise, tails wagging. “Say goodbye to the poor creature back there,” advised the father. “And be grateful that you have so much more than they do.”

Just then the hyena darted from her hiding place and jumped on first one pup and then the other, and finished them off in a few bites. They didn’t even have time to squeal. Meanwhile, the father had sauntered along, unaware, leaping after a Frisbee he found on the path to the house. “Come along, boys,” he finally said, looking back. “Boys?”

Moral: Knee-jerks get what they deserve.

THE **G**UN AND **M**ONKEYS

In Monkeytown at the zoo the big males were 1) chasing and biting the smaller males and keeping them in their place, 2) humping the females, and 3) — every now and again — sitting contentedly to be groomed. Their large faces had whiskery recesses that attracted various vermin, which, not incidentally, made tasty snacks. In other words, everything was normal in Monkeytown.

But one day a young male enticed a young female off to the side near the moat, and they enjoyed each other's company, shall we say. When he heard about it, the large male monkey, in whose territory the young female lived, grew outraged and bared his fangs and scolded her until she skulked off into a small cave that served as one of the colony's sleeping quarters. To the offending young male he gave six nasty bites, raising welts, and even ripping out several patches of fur. The young male sat off by himself and nursed his wounds and a grudge. After a time he picked up a stick and swiped at an even younger monkey that happened to be passing by.

And that was the end of that — more or less.

One night, just before closing time, a visitor to the zoo thought it would be a good idea to throw a loaded gun and a box of bullets into the moat. Only the thrower knew the reason — to get rid of evidence, to balance the odds for the younger monkeys against the

older — or supply your own reason. The fact of the matter is that the gun and bullets were thrown.

And that gun was found, too.

The monkey who found it was the young male monkey who had been punished. He picked the gun from the moat, not quite sure what it was. But it looked hard and might make a good object to hit the older male monkey with. And sure enough, he took the gun up to where the older monkey was being groomed and shook the gun at him. The older monkey merely closed his eyes and let the grooming continue.

The younger male monkey was just about to put the gun down, his pride somewhat assuaged, and wait to grow up and have his turn chasing, humping, and being groomed. But his finger caught on the trigger, and the gun suddenly discharged, sending a bullet through the heart of the older monkey. He fell over dead, much to the dismay of the grooming monkeys, to say nothing of the vermin living in his whiskers, who departed immediately.

The tale should have ended there, no doubt. The younger monkey should now have paired off with the young female, right? But it wasn't to be. You see, the young female caught the young male cavorting with several other young females in a ménage. She got the gun and shot them all dead. This was much better, she felt, than shrieking and baring her teeth.

Eventually another resident of Monkeytown shot the young female to death as well. The explanations varied — she'd stolen some fruit, she'd given or gotten bad grooming, she'd . . . whatever. She was dead.

The story should have ended there, if only because the gun had run out of bullets. Yet it didn't end there.

One day a baby monkey discovered the box of bullets in the moat. Though they

were wet, they still worked. And let's just say there were enough to go around. Monkey #3 shot Monkey #6, and then #6 (as he was dying) shot #12. Yet no one seemed to be able to figure out that this kind of thing had not happened before they'd found the gun and the bullets in the moat.

“We need to teach our young the value of monkey life!” said some. “I have a God-given right to target practice!” said others. “A leopard could sneak in here at Monkeytown and then where would we be without a gun?” still others said. “A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the monkeys to keep and bear Arms shall not be infringed,” said the rest.

Pretty soon there were no more monkeys in Monkeytown, and the zoo shut down the exhibit.

Moral: Guns don't kill monkeys. Monkeys do.

THE **H**UMMINGBIRD AND THE **C**AT

Here Pretty Kitty was sitting in the backyard of her home, washing her sweet little Face with one paw. She was a Bombay, her fur as black as the ocean floor, her eyes with lovely golden irises along with dark, dark gleaming pupils. She was sitting on the fence minding her own business, licking, cleaning, licking, cleaning.

Inside the masses of ivy where he lived Henry Hummingbird was watching Here Pretty Kitty from a safe distance. She was new to his world, and he didn't quite know what to make of her. So he sat unmoving in the niche he had made for himself several years before. Henry Hummingbird was no bigger than a minute, with a green silvery head and cobalt feathers on his body. He loved to flit about the garden, sipping with his long beak from the nectar feeder that a human being had set up for him. Sometimes he would sit on the tree in the garden, sometimes on the trellis, sometimes on a metal arbor in the yard next door.

Here Pretty Kitty did not even look his way. She was too busy keeping herself tidy. She began to lift her hind leg and work on an untidy area on her bottom. The taste did not seem to bother her in the least. Her rough tongue was just as busy as it could be.

What could she be doing? wondered Henry Hummingbird, who also groomed himself from time to time, but he never licked his bottom. He watched Here Pretty Kitty

with great interest. Perhaps I should see what she is doing? he told himself. And thus he flew a little closer to Here Pretty Kitty.

He hovered in the air across the yard from her.

She did not acknowledge him.

He darted closer to where she was sitting on the fence.

Here Pretty Kitty did not glance his way.

Finally Henry Hummingbird flitted directly above Here Pretty Kitty's head and hovered there to examine her behavior, twisting his head from side to side. Who is this that has come to live here? he wondered. She's not very friendly!

Guess what? Curiosity killed the . . . hummingbird.

THE **K**OALA AND THE **G**ALAH

Bruno the Koala was eating eucalyptus leaves while clinging to the trunk of the tree he lived in. He munched and munched and then munched some more. Goody! These high-fiber gum leaves keep my fur healthy and thick, he thought. Lucky me. Eucalyptus also makes my tufted ears stick out so that everybody thinks I'm cute. I am quite a wonderful marsupial, and so comfortable here in my tree. Yum, yum, yum!

He looked down at the ground at the other creatures running around, for one reason or another, and shuddered, and munched some more leaves. And no one else but me can eat these, he laughed to himself. I am set for life. He munched another leaf and listened contentedly to the ones already in his belly gurgling as they were digesting the toxins that would poison almost any other creature.

“Don’t you ever get bored eating just eucalyptus leaves?” a not-so-little bird on a nearby branch asked him. It was a galah with a gray back and rosy pink underparts and a pink eye-ring. The bird had stopped for a moment to rest in its search for grubs and seeds.

Bruno opened his sleepy small eyes and tried to locate the bird above him. “Go away!” he said in a snarly voice. “This is my tree.” He sprayed his scent on it again so that the message would be clear.

“I don’t dispute that,” the not-so-little bird said. “I was just wondering if you ever yearn to be somewhere or do something else.”

“It’s none of your business,” harrumphed Bruno.

“It’s not that I really care,” answered the bird. “I was just making small talk until I fly away.”

“That’s just like you,” Bruno said.

“And what is that supposed to mean?”

“You’re a flibbertigibbet!” Bruno snapped.

“I am not!” the bird said, incensed. “I get out and do things. You just stay here all the time!”

“I don’t have to go out and do things,” said Bruno contemptuously. “I had the foresight to pick a good place with lots of eucalyptus leaves around me.”

“But they taste so terrible!” the bird said. “How can you eat them!”

“I have good genes,” said Bruno. “My ancestors learned in the Lean Times in the Long Ago to eat them, and I am very glad that they did and that they passed this habit down to me. Too bad yours didn’t.”

“I ate a eucalyptus leaf once,” replied the bird. “It tasted like buffalo urine.” He made a face, as much as a bird can make a face.

“You should have inherited genes like mine,” Bruno boasted. “Then you wouldn’t have to live the way you do. I have a caecum organ and you don’t!”

“How did you manage to get your own eucalyptus grove?” asked the bird.

“I inherited this. It’s been handed down for generations and generations.”

“And how did your ancestors get this grove in the first place?”

“The One on High gave it to them.”

“I’ll bet!” said the not-so-little bird.

“You’re just jealous,” said Bruno. “Now be off with you! You’re disturbing my breakfast. Or is it my lunch?”

“You’re very territorial, aren’t you?”

“Your kind just never seems to learn, does it?” Bruno said smugly. “I bet your chicks will be just like you — never knowing where the next bug is coming from.” He smiled to himself and burped softly.

“You really are quite a surly, unpleasant person, despite your cuddly appearance,” said the bird, flicking his rosy underparts.

“Get out! I’ve small-talked long enough with you,” said Bruno.

“I don’t care to stay for another moment,” the galah replied and flew off, dropping something behind him.

“You’re all alike, trying to take my space! Always seeking new taste sensations! Always chirping and jumping around! Good riddance!” Bruno tried to get his heartbeat to return to normal but it wasn’t easy. Finally he managed to begin to doze off, taking one last look at his eucalyptus domain. “O lucky, lucky me!” he prayed. “Thank the One on High, once again, for what I have and what I am. Amen.”

But when he awoke a few hours later something was wrong. He looked around him and could see no eucalyptus grove at all, just the lone tree that he was in, and even that had changed. There wasn’t a single leaf left on his tree, indeed not one leaf in the entire place. Bruno tried to spy what had happened, but his eyes had never been very good. He tried to clamber down the tree to see what the problem was, but his legs were not all that fast. “What has happened? What has happened?” cried Bruno as he scampered on all fours along the ground.

“A great wind came and blew everything away,” said a bird flying overhead. It was not the same bird, but another one that looked very similar.

“But why?” Bruno shouted. “How could this happen to me?”

“Come with me,” this bird said, fluttering above Bruno’s head. “There are grubs and seeds and fruits on the other side of the mountain. I can see them up ahead. Come!” The bird flew ahead but stopped when Bruno did not follow. “Didn’t you hear me? The great storm that came blew grubs and seeds aplenty — and even some eucalyptus leaves, I believe. Just there — there in the Land Over the Mountain!” the bird encouraged.

“Come with me and we will make a new beginning!”

The galah flew over Bruno’s head many times, urging him to come with him, but Bruno the Koala just sat there on his haunches. As he listened to the last of the eucalyptus gum leaves digesting in his caecum, he began to make the sickening cry of a baby screaming, for he knew that he would never, never make it over the mountain.

Moral: Sometimes even conservatives get what they deserve.

LAMBS AND WOLVES

It was a typical day in the Lake District, rainy. The lambs were newly born (but a few months old) and baa-ing for their mothers, even when they, the mothers, had moved away for just a moment. The lambs were white, with fleece as white as dough, and everywhere their mothers went, the lambs were sure to go.

It wasn't ten of the clock in the morning yet, and already the wolves were lurking on the edge of the field, hungry, or at least they were salivating, gobs of spittle falling onto the rain-soaked sod.

The mother sheep and their lambs did not seem aware of the wolves, though experience should have taught them a thing or two. The mothers at least were surely aware that other sheep and lambs had in the past been attacked, killed, and eaten. Alas, sheep are not very intelligent. It's all there in the eyes. It's not "unfair" to notice the truth.

But for some reason this season's lambs had one odd little fellow among them. He was named Clarence, who was a bit ungainly, a trifle nervous, it must be said, but Clarence had a big head and a big brain. He saw that the other sheep and lambs were unaware of the pack of wolves and wondered why they were so passive, so content to nibble the grass and await their destiny. Ignorance is bliss? No, ignorance is piss! thought Clarence. These wolves salivating over there are just waiting to devour us. How dare they! They just seem to assume

their right to be aggressive and hateful, and we're supposed to stand here waiting for them to come and slaughter us. I won't have it! I won't! Little Clarence with the big head stamped his little hoof. "Mummy," he said, "there are wolves over there!"

"I know, dear," his mother answered. She was eating some dandelions and trying to avoid sheep paddies, which were numerous.

"Let's do something about them!" Little Clarence said. "Come on!"

"What can we do?" his mother replied. "We're sheep."

"I'm not a sheep!" Clarence declared.

"I'm afraid you are, dear."

"I will not stand here and be attacked and accept it as my fate!" Clarence said.

His mother shook her head at her odd little child.

"Let's do something, mother! Let's make a plan!"

"There is nothing we can do, Clarence. The wolves have long, sharp fangs and we do not."

"Let's get together and organize!" Clarence said.

His mother looked over at the sheep. "Don't count on them," she sighed. She was only two years old but resigned.

"Arise, sheep!" little Clarence called out.

The sheep looked startled, as sheep will, but none of them stopped what they were doing — eating and waiting.

"Let's call the police!" Clarence went on.

"The police do not listen to us," his mother explained. "In fact, the police are in cahoots with the wolves."

"But why?" Clarence persisted. "This is not right. Not right at all!"

“It’s the way it has always been,” his mother said. “Now shut up, eat some grass, and prepare to die.”

“I don’t accept this. I will never accept this!” Clarence was getting hot under the collar, his nose flaring.

All this while the wolves were slowly crawling forward on their bellies, sending signals to one another about which sheep they should take out first. They agreed upon Clarence, because he was the one causing the greatest commotion. “We’ll eat him from the ass in,” the head wolf ordered, “as usual.”

“I can hear you!” Clarence said. And Clarence was not having it!

First he began to rub his ass on the grass. He was quite furious about it. Soon there was no fleece around his anus. Next he rubbed up against some bushes until his ass was tender, red, and tempting. Then he turned toward the pack of wolves and waved that tender red ass at them, back and forth, forth and back.

“Is that blood I smell?” the head wolf cried out, unable to resist.

Before you could say boo, the wolves started to run toward Clarence. “Come, child,” his mother called. “Now it is time to run, and if I do not survive, please know that I loved you.”

“Don’t run, mummy!” Clarence shouted. “Nobody run!”

“It’s not much, but it’s our only chance!” a sheep yelled.

But Clarence wouldn’t let them run. He stood in front of them, exhorting them to hold their ground. The wolves by now were almost on top of the herd.

“We’re done for!” another sheep baaed, on its knees, its neck exposed for the kill.

But suddenly Clarence leapt backwards right into the center of the wolf pack and began to rub his bleeding ass hard into the wolves’ eyeballs. He was relentless, blinding

one and all, even the head wolf, Alf. Little Clarence just kept pushing his hot, bloody ass into their muzzles until they couldn't see or breathe, and then methodically, one by one, he smothered each blinded wolf with his smoldering, lamby ass, which just kept getting hotter and hotter and bloodier and bloodied all the while. It stung, but Clarence's adrenaline was pumping, and he was on a mission because he wasn't going to be anybody's supper if he could help it.

(And he wasn't, it can now be told.) Soon all the wolves in the pack were dead. For you see, instead of them whipping this sheep's ass, as it has always been, his ass whipped them!

Moral: Gay liberation is indeed a wondrous thing.

LEON, THE TABBY CAT

In an alley behind an old trash dumpster in a big city Leon was born one day — when he was just a *youngster*, boys and girls! He was one of seven other tabby cats, and the last to come into the world, and, sad to say, Leon was barely breathing when he arrived. You see, he was so big that as he was being delivered he got stuck in his mother's . . . tummy, boys and girls. But you know what? His mommy licked him and licked him until he started to breathe just like all his brothers and sisters. Remember, it's very important to *breathe*, boys and girls! Leon did!

It was a hard life for poor little Leon — because he was so big compared to the other kittens. “You’re fat, Leon!” the other kittens hissed at him. “You take up too much room! We hate you and that unruly hair on your neck!” they said, making Leon feel very bad about his appearance. Brothers and sisters can sometimes be very difficult to deal with, isn’t that right? But somehow we manage, isn’t that so? Leon managed!

All that the kittens had to live on was the milk that came from their mommy's . . . milk place, and her milk place had only six . . . faucets. And, as you recall, boys and girls, there were how many kittens? *Seven!* That’s right! That meant that Leon didn’t get as many meals as the others did. There just was hardly any room for him to fit in.

However, sometimes his mommy, even though she was exhausted from the other six

who were using her faucets, found time to feed Leon on his own. He was always so grateful and tried not to step on his mommy and hurt her. He knew that he was big and clumsy and overweight, and so he tried his best not to be a burden to anyone. In fact, there were times when Leon didn't drink milk at all — but lived on garbage from the alley! Not that little *human* boys and girls should ever eat garbage, right?

But Leon was quite good at finding garbage — chicken bones, pork rinds, tacos, lots of things — and he even remembered to eat his vegetables when his mother reminded him! Leon's brothers and sisters ate the garbage that he brought home for them, and so did Leon's mother sometimes. "You are a good son," she purred to him.

"No, he's fat and ugly!" said the brothers and sisters, even though they dined on Leon's food. They were a severe trial for poor Leon and often made his heart sigh with grief. We all feel bad about things sometimes, don't we, boys and girls? But we pick up our heads and go out and find more . . . garbage. Food! We go out and find more *food* and share it with those we love and those who love us.

"I think our mommy should kick Leon out!" one of the smallest kittens said one day when he was not around.

"Yes, he takes up all the room!" another agreed.

"We'd be much better off curled up without him!" said a third. "He stinks!"

"Now, now, be kind to your brother," their mother said gently to the six. kittens.

"We won't! You can't make us!" two of them said together.

Their mother just shook her head and lay on her side and let them partake of her faucets.

Just then Leon came home, dragging a wonderful find. He couldn't read yet, but it was something in a wrapper with words on it. It smelled good, even though some of it

was missing. “What is it, Mommy?” Leon asked. “What have I found?”

His mother sniffed it carefully. If the truth be told, she couldn’t read either, having been unable to go to school since she had become early on an un- . . . a single mother! The wrapper was a bit soiled, but what was inside seemed to be all right. She pawed it open.

“Why, it’s a bacon burger!” she exclaimed. “In fact, there are several! See what your brother Leon has brought us, children!”

“Mine’s stale!” said one of the sisters.

“Mine’s too tough!” said another.

“Now, now,” said their mother, with a great sigh. Maybe she would wait this time, she told herself, once this litter was grown and on its own, before she got . . . her tummy full of kitties again. Yes, I’ll wait a whole week this time, she thought.

Leon sat back on his haunches and watched the others dining on the bacon burgers. Truth be told, he had taken a few bites for himself before he brought the burgers back to the family. The tinfoil wrapper had gotten stuck in his teeth at first, but he had succeeded in spitting it out.

“Aren’t you going to have any?” his mother asked Leon, a bit of bacon grease on her upper lip.

“I’m fine,” Leon said.

The brothers and sisters didn’t even look up from their food, and not a one of them thought of thanking Leon for having brought it to them. “Well, at least Weon’s not weating with us anymore!” said a brother, chewing away.

“The big, ugly oaf!” another said, and they all giggled among themselves.

Then one dark and foggy night, boys and girls, Leon went away. Yes, he did.

“Where’s Leon?” someone noticed a day or two later.

“I’m afraid he’s gone,” said their mother, her whiskers drooping.

“Well, good riddance to bad rubbish!” said the kittens.

“I’m hungry!” they said a little while later. “Mom, go out and get us some bacon burgers!”

“I’m afraid I can’t,” their mother said. “I am sick.”

“But you can’t be sick. You’re our mother and you owe us!”

Their mother sighed, closing her eyes. “I’m afraid I have a tumor,” she said.

“You can’t have a tumor!” they cried. “What a nasty word. Mommies don’t have tumors!” The six kittens began to cry.

Their mother did her best to comfort them, but there was only so much she could do. And only so much time left. “You should have learned to fend for yourselves,” she said.

“We fended!” they protested.

“I’m afraid you didn’t, boys and girls. You relied on me. You relied on your brother Leon. And now you have no skills to bring home the bacon for yourselves.”

“We *don’t*?” the kittens cried, growing afraid.

“Alas, you don’t,” their mother said, closing her eyes and . . . going to sleep . . . for a long, long time.

You can imagine what happened to those six little kittens, can you not? Just don’t dwell on it. Let’s just say it wasn’t pretty.

Leon, meanwhile, had moved to Africa and took up with another family. And it became clearer every day that the reason Leon was so big and had that unruly hair was that another life, another world was meant to be his destiny. For you see, boys and girls, Leon had somehow been born into the wrong family. He wasn’t a tabby cat after all! And

do you know what he was? That's right! Leon was a lion!

Moral: There will always be a market for kids' schlock, boys and girls.

THE MICE AND THE CAT

The seven little mice were playing behind the wall when their mother found them. “Come, children,” she said. “It is time now for you to learn some lessons.” She looked very stern, her brow furrowed as she lined them up.

“Oh, do we have to?” several of them complained. “We aren’t finished playing yet.” They giggled and jumped on each other and bit each other’s tails.

“Children, children! It’s time to learn how to avoid the cat who lives out there,” said their mother. “It is very important that you learn this.”

“I’ll bet!” They did not seem to want to pay attention.

“That cat is very dangerous.”

“Oh, you aren’t going to lecture us, for heaven’s sake?” said Molly Mouse, rolling her beady eyes.

“Yeah, that’s so boring,” agreed Manny Mouse.

Mother Mouse twitched her whiskers. “Do you know what happened to the last litter around here?” she snapped.

“Oh, you’re just saying that to scare us!” said Morris Mouse, punching one of his brothers.

“I just want to point out some precautions you must take when you go out looking for food.” Mother Mouse was getting very irritated.

But the mice children would not listen. They stuck out their tongues and made faces behind their paws. “Our mother is so *serious*,” one of them said. “She’s no fun at all! Just because she’s afraid of a cat, there’s no reason *we* have to be!”

“It won’t take very long,” said Mother Mouse and began her instructions on how her children should behave. But the children began to nod off. Their attention span just wasn’t what it should have been. “Are you listening to me at all?” asked Mother Mouse.

But no one was.

“Children! Children, wake up! What’s wrong with you? Don’t you realize what could happen to you? I want to warn you about the cat who lives on the other side of the wall!”

Melissa Mouse opened one drooping eyelid. “Can’t you make the lessons FUN? That way we might stay awake.”

“I’m telling you something very important about your future,” Mother Mouse argued. “There’s nothing FUN about it.”

“Can’t we make paper cut-outs of Mickey Mouse?” Mary Mouse asked.

“Or paint our faces like clowns?”

“Or maybe sit in a circle and give our opinions about what catness means to each of us?”

The suggestions were many, and it took the whole lesson for Mother Mouse to answer them all. But still the mice children would not sit still and listen. They insisted on doing paper cut-outs and painting their faces and giving their opinions even though not one of them had ever seen a cat.

“Now that was fun, getting her to argue with us,” said the mice children when the lesson was over. “Let’s do it again next time she tries to tell us about that dumb old whatever on the other side of the wall.”

But there was to be no next lesson.

When they went out for food for the very first time, the dumb old whatever ate every one of the seven mice children.

And for the cat what FUN that was!

THE **O**POSSUM AND THE **A**NACONDA

Jake the opossum had injured his hind leg in a skirmish with a caiman. The wound was bleeding and Jake was limping. His coarse grayish-white fur was slimy from the reeds around the river, where he had been looking for crayfish. His pointy white face and hairless, scaly tail were wet too, and the little opossum did not know if he had strength enough to go on. But at least he had escaped the caiman.

He sank down into the reeds and other vegetation and decided he would rest until the bleeding in his leg stopped. Suddenly he heard a slithering noise nearby. He lifted his snout carefully and saw Alice the anaconda coming his way. He had always avoided her because he did not like the look of her dark-green skin covered with black oval spots. She also had wide jaws with fangs right in front. And her eyes were like slits. She likewise had a bad reputation in the neighborhood.

Just as he thought she had not seen him and was about to glide by, Alice stopped and glanced over toward him, her tongue flicking. "Hello there," she said.

Jake chose not to respond. He had heard that she was a lady of ill-repute.

"I said hello."

Jake did not like something in the tone of her voice and decided that he had better feign death. He went limp. If only he could get back to his hollow tree he would be all right,

he thought. Right now I will outwait her.

“I know you’re just pretending to be dead,” Alice said. “You’re all alike, you possums. I knew your father and mother.”

Jake still refused to answer. He was not going to be intimidated by insults from a prostitute!

The anaconda slithered closer and flicked her tongue at his stout body. “I see that you are injured,” she said.

Jake maintained his silence, not moving a muscle.

“I can cure that, you know” Alice said.

One of Jake’s eyes opened. “You can?”

“I can stop the bleeding. I know how to apply a tourniquet.”

“What’s a tourniquet?”

“Here, let me show you,” she said, undulating her long body.

“I’m not so sure about this,” Jake said. “I have heard rumors about you.”

“Oh? And what do they say?”

“That you entice creatures with false promises and then do nasty things to them.”

As Jake spoke, he backed up a few steps, checking behind him for the caiman.

“That is an out-and-out lie,” said Alice. “I see it as my mission to go through the waterways looking for others to help. When I find someone, I offer whatever that creature needs.”

“Really?”

“Really!” she said, undulating a bit nearer. “But mostly what I offer to those in need is what they seldom ever, ever get around here.”

“And what is that?”

“A hug,” said the anaconda. “A great big hug in this cruel, cruel world.”

“Are you a nurse then?” asked Jake.

“I’m studying to become one,” she said.

“Perhaps I should wait until you are fully trained.”

“I wouldn’t turn down free treatment if I were in pain, if I were you. You are in pain, aren’t you?”

“A little.”

“You poor thing,” said the anaconda. “My heart goes out to you.”

“You’re sure it’s free?” asked Jake.

“Of course.”

“And what do you get out of it?”

“Just the satisfaction.” She came closer. “Of a job well done.”

“How long does the tourniquet last?”

“It’s up to you.”

“And the hug — if I have one?”

“All you have to do is say ‘when.’”

The opossum mulled over the offer. “You’re positive about this?”

“As certain as anything.”

“And I’ll be totally cured afterwards?”

“Totally. You’ll no longer be in pain.”

The opossum stood up in the reeds. “Very well then, I agree.”

“Let’s start with the hug first,” said the anaconda. “It will calm you down, and we can proceed from there.”

“After the hug, you’ll tend to my bleeding leg, promise?”

“On my word of honor.”

“Okay. I’m ready,” said Jake.

The anaconda gave the opossum a hug he thought he’d never forget. But of course he did. He forgot everything as he slid down her throat without a single further question.

Now I ask you, who plays possum better?

THE **P**ANDA

The panda named Ding-a-Ling broke the hearts of everyone who saw her. Her round, white face, black ears and black-ringed eyes, soft paws, and roly-poly gait more than made up for the fact that she was solitary and surly.

“We should insure that this adorable bear continues as a species,” said everybody.

“Absolutely!” said everybody else.

So they brought in male pandas to mate with Ding-a-Ling. But she rejected them. She even gave one a nasty red scrape across his nose. She showed not a sliver of interest in any one of the other bears, just sat on her haunches in the preserve chomping on bamboo shoots, even though she had to do it sixteen hours a day to get enough nourishment to live.

“Maybe she will like Boo-Ba-Loo, the large male from America,” they said. So they shipped in Boo-Ba-Loo and put him in the pen next to Ding-a-Ling. He sniffed at her, but she didn’t even glance his way. “Maybe she is a lesbian,” they said.

So they artificially inseminated Ding-a-Ling with Boo-Ba-Loo’s sperm. They had to tie her down and sedate her to do it, but they managed. Boo-Ba-Loo did not object to his sperm being used this way, although he would have preferred the old-fashioned way.

Everybody was overjoyed when Ding-a-Ling conceived. She showed all the signs of impending motherhood, restlessness, a swollen vulva, and constant licking of herself.

Finally the big day came, and Ding-a-Ling's cub was born. They named it Ding-a-Ling-Boo-Boo, after its parents. There was much rejoicing around the world.

But then Ding-a-Ling took one look at the blind, squealing, slippery, tiny object that had popped out of her and moved away. She left it yelping for her on the floor of the pen. By the time the staff rescued it, it was too late.

Since pandas only come into heat two days a year, they had to wait a whole year for Ding-a-Ling to be ready to conceive again. This time she sat on her baby and crushed it.

“Oh my!” said the whole world.

Next time they showed Ding-a-Ling a video of another mother cuddling and nursing her baby, even moving it from nipple to nipple to insure that it got plenty of nutritious panda milk. Ding-a-Ling loved the video, but this time she ate her baby.

“She was stressed,” explained the staff of the preserve.

“How many pandas are left in the world?” everybody wondered.

“Just a few.”

“We will try with Ding-a-Ling next year,” said the staff.

“Yay!” said the world.

Moral: Nature is not sentimental about panda bears or any other fussy fuckers.

THE **P**HOENIX AND THE **T**ABLE **B**IRD

Aurora the phoenix arose from her nest and spread her gorgeous plumage. I am simply too wonderful for words, she thought, flapping her wings. She let out a cackle-chuckle from her beak. Oh, I am perhaps a bit vain, she admitted, but it is so . . . so good to be born again! How many times is this now? I've lost track. She looked down at the remnants of eggshell around her feet and kicked them out of her way. There was a bit of smoke in the air, and she took a sniff. Wood smoke? That didn't seem right. The last time it had been smoke with incense and perfume.

A thousand years can come and go in a blip of a bird's eye, she reminded herself. I'd best be out and about doing the work that only a phoenix can do! She hopped off the nest and prepared to take flight toward the skies overhead. Except that she noticed a wire fence above her. And another wire fence in front of her. And one behind. Chicken wire? Was that chicken wire? What was going on here?

"Do you not know who I am!" she trumpeted for one and all to hear. "Open this fence immediately!" She carried on something fierce, making quite a racket. "Do you hear me, I say!" she insisted.

She heard footsteps coming her way.

Well, it's about time! she thought.

“Hey, look, Sharlene, that bird has finally hatched out of that egg! Look at that thing. Whoeee, ain’t she pretty!”

“She sure is, Clem! Pretty as a picture!”

“Oh, fans!” said Aurora dismissively.

“Yum, yum!” said Clem and Sharleen.

“Get away from me, you clods!” the phoenix snorted contemptuously, backing away from the fence.

“Here, chicky-chicky . . . Here, chicky-chicky,” Clem and Sharlene said, approaching Aurora.

Moral: One man’s phoenix is another man’s poultry.

THE **R**ABBIT AND THE **F**OX

A rabbit named Larry noticed that its brothers were being caught and eaten by a fox that lived close by. So he decided to change his appearance and he urged his brothers to do the same. They kept the brown fur, the twitching nose, the long ears, and the timid nature, but they changed their feet from small to large.

“Now we will be able to run faster than the fox,” said Larry the rabbit.

But he noticed that many of his brothers were still caught and eaten by the fox.

“It is not fair,” said Larry and wondered what else to do. He thought and thought about it. “I know!” he said at last. “I will grow soft pads on my feet so that I can run without being heard!” Larry the rabbit did so, and encouraged his remaining brothers to do so too, and they did.

Then Larry the rabbit noticed that the fox had grown huge ears, and, moreover, these ears could move back and forth to catch every sound. The fox continued to catch the Larry’s brothers and eat them.

“I know, at last, what we must do,” said the rabbit. “We should change the color of our coats!” He had noticed that snow had fallen over the entire region where he and his remaining brothers lived. “We must change our coats to white!” said Larry. And he

encouraged his remaining brothers to do the same. “Now we will be impossible to see,” said Larry the rabbit.

But then he noticed that the fox had changed its coat to white as well. “The fox will be harder for us to see now,” said the rabbit. And he was right. The fox continued to catch and eat his brothers.

“Now I know!” said Larry. “We must have many, many babies very fast. I notice that the fox does not do this. There will be more of us, and so the chances of any one of us surviving will be much improved.” He encouraged his few remaining brothers to do the same. And they did. In fact, the rabbits celebrated childbirth quite a bit.

Yet the fox continued to catch and eat his brothers, and one day he even caught and ate the rabbit who had had all the suggestions, Larry.

Moral: Hey, you do what you can, but when you’re a rabbit there’s not much you can do.

THE SCREECH OWLS AND THEIR BABY

Mother and father screech owl had just given birth to their first-born. In fact, a segment of the broken eggshell still sat atop the young one's head, covering one big, unopened eye. "Just look at that facial disk and those ear tufts! Isn't he adorable!" cried the mother.

"Precious!" agreed the father screech owl.

"Now you must go and fetch him a mouse tidbit, Otis," said the mother.

"Won't be a minute," said the father as he flew off. In no time at all he was back with a small vole in his beak.

"I distinctly remembering requesting mouse," mother screech owl complained.

"It was all I could find."

"And you call yourself a provider." She fussed over the chick and got it ready for its first breakfast. "I guess it will have to do," she said. "Well, help feed baby," she said, and the two parents ripped apart the vole and began stuffing the tidbits into the gaping baby mouth.

The baby screech owl swallowed every bite and begged for more. "I'll get it," said the father and flew off and brought back a grasshopper and a tit. "That's more like it," said the mother. She and the father watched in awe as their baby devoured every

morsel.

“What a wonderful, wonderful baby!” the mother cried.

“And it won’t be our last,” said father owl, winking knowingly. “Isn’t that right, honey?”

“Oh, you!” said mother screech owl, looking coy.

The baby bird exuded some white matter from his little anus. “And just look at that!” cried the father.

“My goodness yes,” agreed the mother. “What digestion! What a treasure!” She scooped up the excrement and ate it. “Yum!” she said.

The two parents pressed around the baby and made it warm and safe. Suddenly the baby opened its beak and a sound came out.

“Did you hear that?” marveled the mother.

“I most definitely did,” said the father.

The baby made another sound, something like a screech.

“Oh, my god! She’s musical!” the mother cried.

“It’s obvious that our child is destined to become a great star of the woodland,” said the father solemnly.

“It’s written in the stars above,” said mother screech owl, looking up at the heavens.

“We must devote ourselves, night and day, to protecting and developing this talent, or it will be lost to the world,” said the father. “I don’t care if I starve as long as our little baby here continues to make sounds like it just made.”

“And I will starve too,” said the mother. “Nothing is too good for this special, special, blessed child.”

They looked down at their baby chick and their hearts filled with pride and joy. The

baby opened its beak again and issued another sound — no, two sounds. Both were something like S-C-R-E-E-C-H!! S-C-R-E-E-C-H!!

“My word, we’re lucky!” cried the mother.

“Aren’t we, though,” cried the father. “Just listen to that!”

Moral: It was, however, still a screech owl to everybody *else*.

THE SPARROWS AND THE SCARLET TANAGER

He followed them here. He followed them there. But they would not speak to him. He tried to join them, but they looked away and muttered about his outrageous appearance. He tried again by making a few sounds like theirs. Yet they stuck together and moved off, irritable. He tried to imitate the way they picked at each other and the way they picked at dirt, stones, and anything else, but he was no good at it. He stood to the side and listened to the way they talked, usually about their young, or food, or the state of their excrement. “Mine is watery today,” he heard one say. “Eat more bugs,” said an old one. “My excrement is always white and firm but still slippery.”

He cried because they would not accept him into their midst. But he cried alone.

He kept coming back to them, trying to disguise himself, trying to snatch bread crumbs with the rest of them. But they always knew it was him. One day one of them bit him on the tail and said, “Get out! We don’t want your kind around here. So go!”

“But why?” he asked. “I have wings and a short bill and everything else just like all of you.”

“Your wings are scarlet and ours are normal — brown. See Leviticus 22, Verses 18 to 21. ‘For whatsoever bird he be that hath a blemish, he shall not approach: a blind bird, or a lame, or he that hath a flat nose, or anything superfluous. Or a bird that is

brokenfooted or brokenhanded. Or a crookback, or a dwarf, or that hath a blemish in his eye, or be scurvy, or scabbed, or hath his stones broken. He that hath a blemish, he shall not come nigh to offer the bread of his God.”

“But my stones aren’t broken,” he said. “Nor do I have anything else such as you describe.”

“Scarlet feathers are a blemish. What’s the matter with you?” was the answer.

So he drooped away. He moaned his fate and wept many a tear. But one day he caught a glimpse of himself in a clear puddle of water. He had never bothered to look at himself before, so intent on being like the others had he been. What he saw startled him. Why, he was beautiful! He had brilliant scarlet plumage that looked like a sunset, and there were handsome green streaks on the tops of his wings. He lifted his voice in sheer joy. “What in the world was I thinking by wanting to be like them!” he shouted, his breast alive with the beating of his heart.

And off flew the scarlet tanager into the welcoming sky, where he headed up into the clouds, glancing down at the sparrows on the ground below, eating their crumbs and discussing their shit.

And then he never looked back again as he soared and soared like a very god above them.

THE SPIDER AND THE CAT

Something has happened to me, but I can't quite tell what it is. I seem to have fallen into a large and deep hole, evidently dug out by a creature many times my size. I think it's what is known as a "cat." I am not good on breeds, but it is yellowish with chocolate points and may be called a Siamese. I am a Daddy Long Legs, not a very becoming or serious name, but then I did not name myself. I have the usual eight legs, minus the one I lost in an encounter with another spider several weeks ago. I can see quite well – well, not that well, apparently!

I was moving along the ground minding my own business when suddenly this "cat" just comes up and starts moving the earth around as if it owned it! I tried hurrying along, but, before I knew it, I was thrown into the hole this creature had made. Believe me, I tried to scamper up the various sides. To no avail.

The next thing I knew there was this "cat" squatting over "its" hole in the ground and a long, yellowish substance was coming out of its anus. And not just one time either! Naturally, I attempted to get out of the way of the yellowish substance before any more fell from on high. Sadly, I tumbled from yet another position on the wall of the dug hole and fell down into the very center of it. Imagine my chagrin when not one but two

squishy, smelly, stringy exudates plopped from the “cat” above me directly onto my tiny, pale body!

So sticky and thick was this material I found myself unable to move. I could also barely see anything at all now, since several of my eyes had been spattered with effluvia and actually seemed to be burning.

I tried calling out for the “cat” to cease and desist from its unseemly behavior, but, alas, my voice is weak, and I do not think the creature heard me. Something tells me it would not have made any difference anyway. I doubt that it would have stopped its frightful activity if the Queen herself had been in my place and begged him to stop. I have had run-ins with “cats” before. They will as soon pick you off a wall and eat you as say hello!

I thought if I waited, the “cat” might finish its business and run off to do whatever it is those things do. But, no, no sooner had it deposited its “business” on top of me, than it began to shovel the dirt it had scooped out earlier back *into* the hole. I don’t think it even saw me as it dragged the dirt over its “business” and even patted it down with its paws, to judge from the sounds I heard above me.

So here I am, buried alive in cat excreta – pardon my language – , which is starting to seep into my flesh, and it is now combined with some small rocks and clammy dirt on top of that. I have tried to move, but I cannot. I must say I feel rather entombed. I believe the “cat” has gone, but it is possible it is lurking nearby to dispatch me if I clamber out of this shit hole. Pardon me, but I am pissed!!

Yet I have ever been an optimist, and I can see a bit of light above me through a small crack in the packed earth. I think it’s just a matter of time before the yellowish material that is all over me dries and I will proceed to dig myself out.

. . . Some time has passed. I am still stuck here and night has come. But I can still see the stars above me, and they are quite, quite lovely.

Moral: You gotta believe what you gotta believe.

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY

Wanda, a long-legged outdoor spider, crawled into the human's house and began a web at the top of one corner of one of the rooms. She did this because winter was coming on.

She worked on the web with the usual diligence and sat herself down at its center and spread her legs wide, waiting.

Several days went by. Wanda had hardly moved at all.

Several more days went by. Nothing had flown into the web, even though it was close to a door that opened and closed often.

Wanda waited.

After a week she moved to the other end of her web and spread her legs again, waiting.

Still, nothing flew into Wanda's web.

She moved to yet another part of her web and prepared herself, waiting.

Another week went by.

A month went by.

A year went by.

Wanda starved to death.

Moral: What is the moral here? Patience isn't enough? Location, location, location?

MRS. SWAN AND MONKEY

Monkey and the swan lived in side-by-side exhibits at the zoo, so they had many occasions to observe each other's behavior. One day the swan, who was white with an elegant, long neck and who referred to herself as Mrs. Sean Swan, couldn't help herself one moment longer and let out a loud honk at what she saw going on next door.

"What was that noise?" monkey asked, as he stopped humping whoever he was humping for a moment. He was dark brown with large moist eyes and a long ringed tail.

"It was me," said Mrs. Sean Swan, aiming her narrow, unforgiving eyes at him. "For god's sake, don't you ever stop carrying on like that?" She raised her beak in disdain.

"Like what?" monkey replied, mystified.

"Always humping! Why, I can see your . . . thing even as we speak. I can always see your thing. It's always out, and I'm tired of it!"

Monkey looked down at his thing, which stood out quite a distance from his body, and grabbed hold of it and gave it a good twang. "Yeah, isn't it great?"

"Disgusting!" said Mrs. Sean Swan. "You people! You give us all a bad name."

"You should try it," monkey said. "Want me to show you how?" He climbed up onto a ledge next to Mrs. Sean Swan's pond, offering to jump over and visit.

“You stay right where you are!” Mrs. Sean Swan said. “My husband will be right home any minute!”

“Aw, come on,” monkey urged. “I bet you have some terrific mites under your feathers that I could get rid of for you. I’d even eat them!”

“How dare you!” snapped Mrs. Sean Swan. “I most certainly do not have mites! And you certainly can’t eat mine!”

“Sure you do,” monkey said. “I’ve seen you and Mr. Swan biting at them. Apparently without much luck either. I could help you both out.”

Mrs. Sean Swan ruffled her feathers and plucked some greenery out of the scummy pond, turning her back on monkey. This kind of familiarity did not even merit a response, she thought.

Monkey went back to resume his humping, only his partner had moved on to somebody else while he was speaking with Mrs. Sean Swan, and so monkey did too. Soon he was in mid-hump again. All around him the whole colony was carrying on, chattering and squabbling and sticking their things into any rump that was up.

Mrs. Sean Swan was unable to avoid looking across the way. “I’m going to call Zoo Security!” she threatened. “You’re acting like a bunch of . . . a bunch of . . . !”

Monkey hopped over to the fence and stared at Mrs. Sean Swan. “Now tell me the truth, lady. You and your old man are really monogamous?”

“Of course!” Mrs. Sean Swan answered. “And if you had any decency you would be too.”

“You really mate for life, the way I’ve heard?”

“Absolutely.”

“Must be hard on your genitals,” monkey said. When Mrs. Sean Swan merely

snorted, he said, “It was a joke . . . hard on the genitals . . . mating for life? Get it?”

“I don’t find it one bit funny,” she said. “Marriage is sacred, and you and your kind make a mockery of it.” She ate some more greenery.

“But how can you stand it? It must be as boring as hell. The same old swan night after night, year after year. I’d go bananas!”

“We don’t find it necessary to carry on like animals. All in good season. All in good season. You could learn a thing or two about civilized behavior, I’m sure of that. Restraint, young man, restraint!”

“Actually I’ve heard that some of you birds just say you mate for life, but some of you carry on on the side.”

“That’s just gossip and scandal — just more of the pornography that you and your ilk try to foist on the rest of us!” Mrs. Sean Swan was in quite a dither now, with her neck almost in a knot.

Monkey shook his head, amazed. “By the way, how do you swans do it? I’ve never seen you do it even once in all the time you’ve lived next door.”

“How dare you!” Mrs. Sean Swan let out another inadvertent honk.

“Do you squat down with hubby standing on top? I saw that in a National Geographic that some human threw into our pit there.”

“You truly are an outrage to this zoo!” Mrs. Sean Swan said. “I’m not going to say another word to you.” She swam off.

“Or do you get on top of him sometimes, huh?” monkey called.

“I will not listen to another filthy word,” said Mrs. Sean Swan, swimming to the far side of her pond and waking her husband to tell him how outraged she was.

“If you ever change your mind, I’m right over here!” monkey yelled. “I can show you

some tricks! You'll love it!"

"Did you hear that?" Mrs. Swan said. "Disgusting!"

"Disgusting, I agree," said Mr. Swan sleepily. "Do you want me to fly over there and bite him on his tail?" He waddled to the front of his sleeping quarters and looked out.

"Don't give him the satisfaction!" Mrs. Swan said. "He'd probably like it!"

"All right, honey," said Mr. Swan, trying to go back to sleep. "Good night, dear."

"Good night," Mrs. Swan replied, settling her feathers as best she could. She closed her eyes, then opened them. "We've got to move," she said. "That's all there is to it."

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Swan.

"Next week we move."

"Yes, dear."

Moral: You can't make a monkey into a swan. Nor would you want to.

THE **W**ILDEBEEST AND THE **L**IONESS

A herd of wildebeests was grazing on one of the great savannas of Africa, thousands upon thousands of them, chomping and then chewing the dry grasses, sometimes play-fighting, stirring up the dust. They looked very much the same, with only slight variations in color from charcoal to brownish-black, a white tail here and there. They kept themselves alert by looking around at places where something might be lying in wait to jump on them and eat them. Their eyesight was not good, but any one of the thousands might spot trouble and let the others know by a snort or a quick gallop.

Waldo, an adolescent wildebeest, looked very much like the others, down to the shaggy neck hair and the ugly face with its wide, steaming nostrils. One day he caught a glimpse of himself in a puddle and noticed that he had a little tuft of golden hair right in the middle of his forehead. “Do you see that tuft?” Waldo said to his friend Stinky. “That means I’m a unicorn!”

“I don’t think so,” Stinky said. “You’re a gnu. We’re all gnus.”

“I ain’t no gnu!” Waldo disagreed. “I thought I was just a wildebeest, which was bad enough, but I ain’t no goddamned gnu. I’m a unicorn, or at least I will be when I grow up.”

Stinky went on chewing some grass. “You think so?” he said with his mouth full.

“Because I’m so special, I’m going to start a fashion trend among these stupid animals,” Waldo said, tossing his head at the herd.

“I don’t think they’re going to follow you, Waldo,” Stinky said. “Eat some grass.”

But Waldo was not listening. Already he had knocked down a small bush and shaped it with his hooves into a cap. It was not easy getting that cap on his head, but he kept fiddling with it until it finally slid down snugly over his ears, covering them completely. “How do I look?” he asked his friend. “Cool, right?”

“You sure look different, Waldo, that’s for sure,” Stinky said.

“You ain’t seen nothing yet!” Waldo snorted.

He found a pair of old pants that a human tourist had thrown out of a passing car years before. They were stiff and dirty, but Waldo stomped all over the pants and softened them and got rid of most of the dirt. The hard part was getting them over his hind legs, which were somewhat bent. “You could help!” he yelled at Stinky. “You don’t get to hang with a unicorn every day.” And so Stinky assisted him, using his teeth.

Waldo tried the pants different ways, but the way he liked best was with the pants way below his waist and the crotch hanging below his knees. Waldo could barely walk when he tried to move. “Cool huh?” he said.

“You look weird,” Stinky said.

Waldo shot back, “I’m the coolest thing on the savanna! Soon all the others will be dressing just like me. You wait and see.”

“Whatever,” said Stinky.

“I’m going for a run over there,” Waldo said, nodding at a deserted section away from the herd. “Want to come?”

“I think we’d better stay here. It’s safer,” Stinky said.

“Okay, be a nobody!” Waldo snapped. “I’ll go my own way by myself!”

And off Waldo galloped. Well, sort of galloped. Because his pants were so far down his legs, he could only take little steps, as if he were crippled. “These are unicorn steps!” he called back to his friend, whom he now considered an ex-friend. “I’m a unicorn, Stinky! But you’re just uniform!”

Waldo laughed merrily at his witticism and hurried off. “Stinky was holding me back,” he muttered to himself. “They are all so predictable over there, and the stench besides! It’s so good to be alone!” He looked back at the herd receding into the distance as he wobbled his way on his own path.

A lioness was lurking in high grass not far away. She saw Waldo hobbling along in his “cool” knee-high-crotch pants and was extremely impressed with his fashion sense. In fact, his movements inspired in her deepest being a desire to see Waldo up close. She could hardly contain herself, her jaw twitching with anticipation as she raced toward the isolated unicorn in the latest fashion statement.

Moral: Sure, some folks are trend setters. But some folks are just jerks.