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The Kukkurik Fables

44 mini-plays for all media

second edition, revised and augmented

Foreword 2008

The Kukkurrik Fables, first published in 1987, and then, in the revised edition presented here, in 2004, are essentially the dramatized versions of *The Gobble-Up Stories*, which can also be found in the California Institute of Technology’s CODA. It may be noticed that some of my mini-dramas differ somewhat from their narrated origins. I created these texts as a result of many a recitation and performance of *The Gobble-Up Stories*. To be sure, my fables in their narrative form worked quite well “live”, but actors prefer play-texts, and this is what the Kukkurriks provide. The name of the fuddled rooster who thought he made the sun rise gave me a title for this recreation not likely to be overlooked....

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Practical Preface

Far more than conventional — or even unconventional — plays, these fables invite directors, actors, musical accompanists, and set, costume and prop designers to *invent*. Shall the production be rich or sober? How many of the fables will be selected — fifteen minutes' worth, an hour's, more? How many actors will be cast — a single one, two, three, four, ten? What mix of male and female? What sort of musical effects, if any? Will the show be a dramatized reading or a fully acted production?

And the choices suggested by these questions are only a beginning. The texts themselves cry out for inventive interpreters. That is why I have kept stage directions to a minimum. Let imaginative minds lovingly but, if I may say so, respectfully shape the material. By “respectfully” I simply mean that the director's cunning and wit should be exercised within the conceptual and emotional borders which — though words are seldom firm — are firmly *enough* marked out by my words. This needs to be said in an age when directors all too often impose their own “vision” on authors absent or dead.

Within these borders, ample room for directive enterprise remains, even to the extent of a modest tampering with the words themselves: a dab of additional dialogue, a few deletions, adjustments of gender, and the like — all to be imposed with tact and respect. With regard to gender, for instance, a number of parts for which I routinely used the masculine (e.g. the lunatic pigeon, or the trouts in “The pony who came to a stream”) can readily be shifted to actresses. Here and there, furthermore, a line need not be spoken by the character to whom I have assigned it. Thus if the final line of “The parliament of animals” were to be given to the narrator, or even to the revived rabbit, instead of being spoken by the lion, the borders I have mentioned before would certainly remain inviolate.

Because the actors and actresses can double, triple, even quadruple the roles they play, these fables do not demand a specific number of performers. Two can manage a fine program. Three or four are undoubtedly preferable. I might recommend three men and one woman, supported by a musician or two. And yet as many as ten could be cast in “The queen and the poodle.”

A word about the ubiquitous narrator. This role can be assigned overall to a single actor or actress, or it can be assumed by all the actors and actresses in turn as the show progresses, in addition to their other parts. Now and again, in a given fable, a single narrator can be played by two or more performers. Or an actor can play a character *and* the narrator. However this is handled, the narrator distinctly inserts the past tense of story-telling in direct juxtaposition with the present tense of the dialogue, and not infrequently he reports to the audience something which will be understood unaided a second later, as when, in “A banquet in Venice,” he or she says, “But now the king turned toward the poor cripple.” In ordinary drama, this would be an unspoken stage direction; here it becomes a speech. Since a brief practical preface is not the place for high theory, I shall simply report that, although a director may choose to suppress a few of these speeches, they constitute, taken all together, one of the fables’ several well-tested building blocks. In short, they *work*; and they contribute not a little to the feeling which differentiates the *Kukkurrik* experience from that of a “normal” program of short plays. As it happens, every director I have worked with has spontaneously woven the figure of the narrator even into the physical action on stage — and thereby, incidentally, made that part as attractive to actors, in almost every story, as the character-roles.

I recommend the first and last fable in the present booklet for the opening and conclusion of a program, but needless to say, this is nothing more than a suggestion. The other fables are printed in alphabetical order for convenient reference.

O.M., 2004

THE SOCIABLE SWALLOW

Characters

Narrator
The Swallow
The Seal
The Leader of the swallows

NARRATOR. A flock of migrant swallows had landed at break of day on a small island in the ocean. One of the swallows, more sociable than the others, decided to strike up a conversation with a seal nearby.

SWALLOW. Ah what a flight we had last night!

NARRATOR. Said the swallow for a beginning. The seal, however, was half asleep, so he lifted only one of his two eyelids and said as vaguely as possible...

SEAL. Oh....

SWALLOW. Oh yes! A thick fog came in maybe a hundred miles from here, we lost sight of the stars, and if we hadn't put a fairly clever leader in charge, we might never have landed here for our rest.

SEAL. Oh....

SWALLOW. Oh yes! Not that I for example couldn't have found the way as well as he. But I'm one of the younger ones, I have to keep my place. However, once we land in the north, I'll find a healthy wife, make a few babies, and become top-swallow in my turn.

SEAL. Oh....

SWALLOW. Oh yes! Of course it's a long way from here. Hundreds of miles, more fog, storms, nasty wind currents, gulls and boobies that cross your flight line. But we know what we're doing and we know where we're going. It's been in our blood for millions of years, swallows are smarties.

SEAL. Oh....

SWALLOW. Oh yes! Look at me for instance. Notice this metal strip around my ankle?

SEAL. Grrumph....

NARRATOR. The seal thought he was having a noisy dream.

SWALLOW. Some fool of a fellow took me in his hands when I was an infant and slipped this ring on for me. Thanks, I said. Somebody makes me a present, I don't ask why. It looks distinguished, don't you agree? Maybe I can pass it on to my children. Heredity, you know. This is known as a decorative mutation.

SEAL. Oh....

SWALLOW. Oh yes! Of course everybody is used to seeing it by now and it doesn't flutter feathers anymore. But on the return trip at the end of the season, when it's always more crowded, I'll attract a lot of attention with this bauble flashing in the sun. It will help my career. To be sure we travel mostly by night, but even then there's the occasional lighthouse. Did you know that lighthouses are dangerous?

SEAL. Oh....

SWALLOW. Oh yes! Fools rush into them and then it's a short plop to kingdom come. The trouble is we fly low, most of the time we skim the waves. And we're crazy about light, we're sun-worshippers, though we do fly at night, I'm not sure I know why, maybe because the stars are useful, who knows?

NARRATOR. Just then the leader of the swallows called his flock together.

LEADER. Away, away, let's make up the time we lost in the fog, away away!

NARRATOR. After they had been aloft for a while, the leader turned to the sociable swallow.

LEADER. Why were you wasting your breath talking to that lump of a seal, when you ought to keep it for the journey?

SWALLOW. Because I for one have an alert mind and like to keep in touch.

LEADER. Keep in touch with a blubbery seal?

SWALLOW. What do you mean, blubbery? Let me tell you that this seal happened to be one of the most interesting personalities I have ever met.

NARRATOR. So spoke the sociable swallow, not without a touch of indignation.... And now that I think of it, I too am utterly fascinated by anyone willing to listen to me.

AGAMEMNON'S CUPBEARER

Characters

Narrator
Agamemnon
Alycus
Sinon
Diomedes
Ajax
Nestor
Odysseus

NARRATOR. Agamemnon and his generals were considering for the three thousandth time how to set about capturing Troy. Achilles was dead, the city was standing as tall and stiff as it had stood ten years before, and it seemed that everything had been tried—

AGAMEMNON. Catapults, battering rams, showers of fire, volleys of treachery, even negotiations.

NARRATOR. What to do next? The warriors thought and thought as hard as warriors can, but Diomedes had no special ideas except...

DIOMEDES. How about a bigger ram?

NARRATOR. Ajax scratched his head and said...

AJAX. Why not send another thousand footsoldiers out to have a bash at the gate?

NARRATOR. Odysseus just looked wily; and Nestor stroked his beard and observed...

NESTOR. Let us be wise.

NARRATOR. Finally they decided to shoot a few more arrows into the town, and then the meeting broke up. Now Agamemnon was alone with his servants, and he sat in his tent a weary man.

AGAMEMNON (*to himself*). The only way out, I suppose, is to send for Sinon...

NARRATOR. The famous military expert from Macedonia.

AGAMEMNON. It's a humiliating step to take—an expert from the provinces!—and it's going to be damned expensive, but what else is

left? A final retreat? Become a clown in the history books? Give Homer a chance to sing scurrilous ballads about me?

NARRATOR. His mind still far away, Agamemnon noticed that his sixteen-year old cupbearer, Alycus, was standing timidly before him, waiting for a pause in the hero's thoughts to speak to him.

AGAMEMNON. What is it, Alycus?

ALYCUS. My lord, you should build a great wooden animal on wheels, hollow inside, and fill it with our best soldiers, and then pretend to break up camp and sail home. The Trojans will be sure to tow the animal into the city, and then at night our men can climb out of it and open the gate so the whole Greek army can pour in.

AGAMEMNON (*smiling*). Lovely; you are one smart little boy; but now go tell Glaukos that he might as well serve; I am dining alone tonight. And bring me quill and tablet before you go.

NARRATOR. That night, Agamemnon wrote to Sinon and summoned him to the Greek camp. Two weeks later Sinon stood before him.

SINON. I'll do my best, general, but it will cost you eight talents.

AGAMEMNON. Eight talents? That's half the booty we've taken in ten years of victories!

SINON. Eight talents for my services, two more if I succeed, and three if I fail.

AGAMEMNON. Why?

SINON. To compensate me for the injury to my reputation.

NARRATOR. Agamemnon almost choked. But there was no bargaining.

AGAMEMNON (*aside*). Damn damn. What if the son of a whore signs up with the Trojans?

NARRATOR. As soon as he was hired, Sinon began to poke—

SINON. Allow *me*.

NARRATOR. Of course, sir.

SINON. I poked at the Trojan battlements, looked for secret drains, measured the walls, counted Greek heads, examined supplies and equipment, reassessed the lines of communication, and even infiltrated Troy itself by disguising two assistants as old Cappadocian crones peddling sausages.

NARRATOR. After four months...

SINON. May *I*?

NARRATOR. Sorry, sir.

SINON. After four months, I submitted my full report, over a thousand tablets long, containing, among others, chapters on Background and Prospects, Tables of Casualties, Losses of Equipment, Forces Committed, Temporary and Permanent Allies, Deficits Due to Desertion, Analysis of Strategy Shifts, and Recommendations for Actions in the Light of Existing Conditions.

NARRATOR. The report was read to the assembled chiefs.

SINON. To conclude, I recommend that a horse be built of wood, filled with seasoned infantrymen and planted in front of Troy while your main body feigns a withdrawal. The Trojans will beyond a doubt lead the horse into the city to rejoice over, and that same night your men will issue forth, open the city's gate, and, together with the main body, overwhelm your foe.

AGAMEMNON. An idea worthy of the gods!..

NARRATOR. Cried Agamemnon. Odysseus chimed in...

ODYSSEUS. I adopt it, I make it mine!

NARRATOR. Ajax was brief and to the point...

AJAX. Smashing!

NARRATOR. And wise Nestor gave his assent too...

NESTOR. The contrivance of a sage.

NARRATOR. The poor cupbearer, who happened to be present, didn't dare remind even himself that he had thought up the selfsame stratagem half a year before, and gratis at that.

ALYCUS (*to himself*). I must have said something different with a stupid twist to it.

SINON (*frostily*). Gentlemen, I am glad you are satisfied. The task of implementation is yours. Tomorrow I return to Macedonia.

NARRATOR. The Greeks paid him, built the horse, took Troy...

AGAMEMNON. And sacked it to the last footstool.

DIOMEDES, AJAX, ULYSSES, NESTOR. AGAMEMNON

(*singing*)

Wave over Troy, victorious flags,

And brawny boys, shout hail!

With booty bulging in our bags,

Stoutly home we sail.

NARRATOR. The story of Agamemnon's cupbearer may be unfamiliar to you. I have it from Arctinus of Miletus, who wrote fables a long, long time ago, and who adds his own curious comment to this one.

ALYCUS. “What father,” says Arctinus, “will listen to the advice of his son, what professor will heed a pupil’s hypothesis, what millionaire will adopt the faith of his mechanic? We Greeks, I am afraid, weigh the man instead of the idea: we had rather keep our heads empty than stoop to be instructed.”

A BANQUET IN VENICE

Characters

Narrator
The King of Podolia
The Doge
The Overseer of Public Charities
The Cripple

NARRATOR. The young king of Podolia was traveling to broaden his views and make friends for Podolia. In Venice he was received with satisfying pomp and shown the wonders of the city, its art treasures, its dungeons, and its famous Arsenal. One late afternoon, after several hours of banqueting in the Ducal Palace, the king turned to the doge who was sitting to his right and said...

KING. My friend and venerable host, tomorrow I must pursue my journey. Allow me therefore to make a last request of you. Bring before me two citizens of Venice. Let one of them be the happiest, and the other the unhappiest man in the state. For to climax the memorable entertainment I have enjoyed in your city, I wish to ask your happiest Venetian for his secret, and help your most wretched citizen out of his misery—if any misery be allowed in your fair republic.

DOGE. A charming request, your majesty, and unmistakably Podolian!

NARRATOR. Now the whispers went eagerly back and forth among the senators and councillors, and a good-humored contention took place, until the doge's own advice prevailed and two messengers were dispatched into very different districts to summon the chosen men. An hour later the two citizens appeared. The contrast between them was unsurprising, for one man was smiling, arrayed in the richest furs, silks and jewels imaginable, while the other was clad in malodorous rags, he tottered along by leaning on a stick, and a nervous anxiety contorted his wrinkled face.

DOGE. Your majesty's wish is granted.

KING. Indeed it is. Ah, my lord, how awesome is the distance from happiness to misery when they stand so nakedly illustrated before our eyes. *(Turning to the two men)* You, sir, shall tell me whether riches alone have made you happy; and you, my poor man, may ask me for a modest sum that shall enable you to make a new and fairer beginning in life.

NARRATOR. Before either of the men could answer, the guests all began to titter, and the doge spoke as follows...

DOGE. Your highness is mistaken. This beaming citizen, our Overseer of Public Charities, happens to be the most miserable creature in Venice. And the happiest Venetian is yonder unwashed and fidgeting beggar.

KING. How can this be? The rich man is all smiles, the poor man looks wretched. All is as it should be, unless a comedy is being played at my expense.

OVERSEER. No, no, your highness, this is no comedy!..

NARRATOR. Cried the Overseer...

OVERSEER. I am smiling because, on the way to the palace, I was informed that your majesty had promised to relieve the unhappiest man in Venice, and now, when I stood before you, I heard the confirmation from your own munificent lips. *(He prostrates himself)*

KING. What ails you? Rise, rise.

OVERSEER. I owned ten galleons trading with the Orient. News came this morning that three are lost at sea. My credit is fatally hurt, I am compelled to dismiss half my cooks and lackeys, and I must either commit suicide, or else suffer the jeers of my hated rival, the Director of Urban Works.

NARRATOR. Hot tears spurted out of the Overseer's eyes, moistening the carpet under him. But now the king turned toward the poor cripple.

KING. And you? If you are the happiest man in Venice, why these rags, why this tormented expression?

CRIPPLE. Um, um, um!

DOGE. He is mute, your majesty, but I shall reply for him. The man was born on the pavement and has slept all his life on cold flagstones. This morning he inherited from a thief we hanged a pallet filled with worms and rotten straw, and tonight he will sleep in a bed for the first time since he was born. My messenger hauled him away as the sun was going down; he longs for his cot; he had been the blissfullest man

in Venice, perhaps in the whole world, and will be so again if your highness will detain him no longer.

NARRATOR. The young king waved his hand in dismissal, and as the doge had foretold, a joyful smile drew itself out on the poor man's face, and he hobbled away on his crutch as speedily as he could.

(The beggar leaves with smiles and thankful noises)

KING *(to the Overseer)*. As for you, I should like to relieve you, but three galleons are two galleons more than Podolia owns. Here, however, is a garnet ring. Wear it; you are now a Knight of the Pewter of Podolia.

NARRATOR. This was no common distinction...

OVERSEER. Oh, thank you, your highness, thank you!

NARRATOR. And the Overseer departed a little less distraught than he had arrived.

DOGE *(smiling)*. My royal friend, you forgot to ask the happiest man for his secret.

KING. I think I know it already, your excellency. To be happy is to take a leap forward, though it be from nothing to little; and to be miserable is to be thrust backward, though it be from very much to merely much.

DOGE *(lifting his glass to the king)*. There is great wisdom in Podolia.

KING *(lifting his glass to the doge)*. It lay dormant until Venice brought it out.

IN THE BELLY OF THE WHALE

Characters

Narrator
Six herring

NARRATOR. A whale had opened his jaws and swallowed a row of herring. The unfortunate fish were flopping about helplessly in the vast stomach, each looking with anguish at the others for signs of help or hope. Instead, one of them began to cry...

FIRST HERRING. Oh my God, oh Jesus in heaven, we are all undone! Don't you see the hole gaping at the end of this cavern? There begins the gut, thither we are bound, and beyond we shall be digested into herring paste!

NARRATOR. The other herring made an uproar at this. On every side, in the dark, came shouts of...

SECOND HERRING. Alarmist!

THIRD HERRING. Rumor monger!

FOURTH HERRING. Ignoramus!

NARRATOR. Then, looking about in the faint phosphorescent glow, they severely contradicted the craven herring.

SECOND HERRING. Gentlemen, the indisputable fact is that we have slipped, somehow, into a quiet restful place.

THIRD HERRING. Almost a resort.

FOURTH HERRING. Say rather a haven, a vault under which neither sharks nor fishing nets are to be feared.

FIFTH HERRING. A new life is beginning for us, gentlemen!

SECOND, THIRD and FOURTH HERRING. Hear, hear!

NARRATOR. At that moment, they heard a familiar voice from afar. It was that of a fellow herring the whale had missed in his gulp.

SIXTH HERRING. Do you hear me down there, all you herring?

THE OTHER HERRING. Yes, we hear you, Ferdinand!

SIXTH HERRING. Good! The monster has fallen asleep. You can all swim out again, but do it quietly!

NARRATOR. Well! The herring forgot their fine words, and with a terrified...

THE FIVE HERRING. Hush hush! Let's get out! Don't push!
Here's the exit! Shhhh!

NARRATOR. They darted and scrambled all over each other to the outside world. Safe again, they happily swam home to their families, each one crying to his kith and kin...

SECOND HERRING. Listen to what happened to me!

THIRD HERRING. Less than an hour ago —

FOURTH HERRING. I who am hugging you now —

FIFTH HERRING. Was staring Death —

(Pause)

FIRST HERRING. In the face....

A BONE OF CONTENTION

Characters

Narrator
The Fox-terrier
The Spaniel
The Hawk

NARRATOR. A fox-terrier and a spaniel were fighting over a steakbone. Merciful heavens, they went for each other with teeth, claws, shoves, barks and kicks.

FOX-TERRIER. Get away from my bone!

SPANIEL. This bone belongs to me!

FOX-TERRIER. Mongrel!

SPANIEL. Flotsam!

FOX-TERRIER. I'll throttle you with your own tail!

SPANIEL. I'll throw you to the cats!

FOX-TERRIER. Oaf!

SPANIEL. Fleaface!

FOX-TERRIER. Lickspittle!

SPANIEL. Perpetrator!

NARRATOR. It was a fearful spectacle, for both dogs were bleeding out of a dozen wounds. Considering this opportunity, a young hawk, inexperienced in the sad ways of the world, came down from a tree in order to pick up the bone for himself. The dogs stopped fighting at once.

SPANIEL. Who's this?

FOX-TERRIER. A foreigner!

SPANIEL and FOX-TERRIER. Brother dogs, unite!

NARRATOR. And both dogs flung themselves on the bird.

HAWK. Help! They're murdering me!

NARRATOR. The hawk was lucky he escaped alive that day with a small loss of feathers. But what would have happened if *I* had reached out a hand for the bone?

SPANIEL, FOX-TERRIER and HAWK. Brother animals, unite!
Down with man!

NARRATOR. Stop, my friends, stop! I was only pretending! But wait. Suppose a Martian were to land and take a fancy to our bone. What then?

ALL FOUR. Earth-brothers, chase the Martian!

NARRATOR. For there isn't *anybody* with whom we couldn't make a faction. In the meantime, the hawk went for other game, the spaniel chewed one end of the bone, and the fox-terrier nibbled the other. They were still bleeding, but they were bleeding in peace.

THE CATERPILLAR AND THE LEAF

Characters

The Caterpillar

The Leaf

(The caterpillar is munching on the leaf)

LEAF. Why are you nibbling me up? said the leaf to the caterpillar. It hurts; I am bleeding; I will die.

CATERPILLAR. Believe me — answered the caterpillar — I have nothing against you personally.

LEAF *(weeping)*. Then why don't you go elsewhere?

CATERPILLAR. Because I have nothing for you personally either.
(He takes another bite. The leaf cries out).

THE CONCEITED MINNOW

Characters

Narrator
The Fisherman
The Minnow

NARRATOR. A fisherman had already caught three handsome trout — they were lying in a basket next to him — when he hooked a minnow.

FISHERMAN. My lousy luck!

NARRATOR. He was about to throw it back into the stream when the minnow, catching sight of his grimace, cried out...

MINNOW. And what's the matter with me, if I may ask? Let me inform you that I'm as good as any trout that swims in these waters. I'm small, but I am good looking, smart, and appetizing. In short, I resent your gesture of contempt and demand to be treated with the respect I deserve.

FISHERMAN. Oh well, if you insist.

NARRATOR. And he tossed the minnow into his basket.

(Narrator inspects belly-up minnow)

NARRATOR. I don't know about people, but in minnows, once the ego breaks loose, there's no telling *where* it will stop.

A CONFERENCE OF KINGS

Characters

Narrator
The First King
The Second King

NARRATOR. Two kings had met to argue over a border dispute. One was clothed in gold and silver, the other was dressed in rags, and his face was full of cuts. The king in gold and silver was shocked.

FIRST KING. Brother, what has happened to you? Look at your rags, look at those bruises, I can't stand it!

NARRATOR. And he forgot all about the border dispute.

FIRST KING. What did they do to you, brother?

SECOND KING. Don't ask. I've been all but hacked to death. I'm a good king. I raised everybody's wages and salaries and commissions and deductions and dividends and pensions and royalties, and the people got used to enjoying money, so they asked for more, the treasury was empty, I sold the queen's jewels, the rich denounced me, the rabble besieged me, everybody threw stones at me, and if it hadn't been for our blessed border dispute they would have murdered me to pieces. While look at you, oh look at you! Gorgeous and peppery, without a wrinkle anywhere on your face. Brother, how do you do it?

FIRST KING. If only you'd asked before! Unlike you, I made my ministers impose a tax on my people so heavy it would have ruined five generations to come. At the last moment, when all you heard in the realm was the noise of sobs and groans, I made an unforgettable gesture from my balcony and reduced the tax by one entire tenth. And now, brother, what do you think?

SECOND KING. That you're rich enough to buy Mammon, and that the people, though hungry, bless you everywhere you go. (*He sobs*)

FIRST KING. My dear, dear people.

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN A BULLDOZER AND A MOUSE

Characters

Narrator
The Bulldozer
The Mouse
The Mother Mouse

NARRATOR. A large bulldozer was tearing up a field in which a family of mice had made its nest. As the bulldozer carved its way nearer and nearer to their home, the mice could hear the groans of wounded bitterweeds and the gasps of slain beetles rising from all sides of the field.

MOTHER MOUSE. What shall we do?

NARRATOR. The mother was crying, hugging her miceling.

MOTHER MOUSE. Look at those terrible jaws gnashing away at the earth! Do something, daddy! Go talk to him!

NARRATOR. So her husband leaped forward and ran up to the machine, which he addressed as follows.

MOUSE. Lord Bulldozer, spare my little family; we are poor but honest mice that have lived in this useless lot for many years without disturbing the peace.

NARRATOR. The bulldozer paused.

BULLDOZER. And what makes you think that I have come to disturb the peace?

MOUSE. Well ——

BULLDOZER. Nonsense! You are thoroughly mistaken. I am leveling the ground for an eighty-five-story apartment house as a special favor to you mice.

MOUSE. As a special favor to us mice?

BULLDOZER. Yes, sir. You have been disgracefully happy in a sordid nest with an occasional dandelion in your gullet; but after I have finished my work, you will take your pick of five dozen rooms, each one overflowing with bread and cheese, potatoes, and lamb

chops. The nation of mice will thrive. You will erect a monument to me.

MOUSE. I am very glad that the nation of mice will thrive; but what about us?

BULLDOZER. Who is us?

MOUSE. Us, me, my woman, and my two miceling.

BULLDOZER. I don't know 'us'; I deal in principles.

NARRATOR. The mouse ran back to his family, and said as cheerfully as he could...

MOUSE. The bulldozer brought me good news: he is growing an apartment house here especially for the nation of mice, and we will live in whipped cream to the end of time.

NARRATOR. And before the mother mouse could make a comment (and that's a pity, because she was a sensible beast)...

MOTHER MOUSE. Look out!

NARRATOR. A ton of earth fell on top of them, and the bulldozer churned on. (*Pause*) Let you be more careful than these mice, and when you see progress coming your way...

THE TWO MICE (*feebly, from under the pile of earth*). Jump aside in time.....

THE CROW AND THE BEGGAR

Characters

Narrator
The Beggar
The Crow

NARRATOR. A beggar was standing with his cap in his hand far from the road, all alone in a field of boulders and stubble. A cold wind crept from gray horizon to gray horizon. Puzzled by the sight, a crow landed among the weeds a few paces from the man.

CROW. Beggar, no one will give you anything in this desert.

BEGGAR. Crow, no one will deny me anything in this desert.

THE DRAGON OF HELGOLAND

Characters

Narrator
The Dragon
The Badger

NARRATOR. We harm those we hate; we also hate those we harm; otherwise our conscience would sting us, and who likes to be stung? Not, at any rate, the dragon who lived in Helgoland.

DRAGON. I am the dragon of Helgoland, and I have taken a vow to exterminate all the unicorns of the realm.

NARRATOR. And may one ask why?

DRAGON. One may not, but I have my reasons, and history is on my side. Now I know there are unicorns in this impenetrable forest and — ecod, I can see one in yon undergrowth. With one belch of flames (*huge noise*) I have now laid waste an acre of land. Good. I hear a feeble lament in the ex-undergrowth which means another unicorn bagged. I'll go over and pay him off with a final curse. Ye gods! What have we here?

NARRATOR. The disappointment was a grave one, for instead of a unicorn, he found a litter of badgers, all burned to death, except for one who was still alive enough to despond.

BADGER. Why did you kill us? What harm did we do you in our short small lives? Why did you strike us down who are innocent?

DRAGON. Innocent devils! I hate you weasels; all the world knows you've been plotting against me with the unicorns!

BADGER. But we are not weasels; we are badgers.

DRAGON. Well, I hate badgers too. They're always standing in the way of my fire.

NARRATOR. The last of the badgers did not live to hear this stiff accusation. But from that time on, the dragon never thought of badgers without spitting a flame of disgust.

DRAGON. Everybody hates me.....

THE EAGLE ON THE MOUNTAIN

Characters

Narrator
The Mountain Climber
The First Eagle
The Second Eagle

NARRATOR. Five sportsmen were climbing a huge mountain no human being had ever scaled. The gales blew and whistled between the crags, on all sides chasms opened, the air was thin, the men gasped and tottered into hurls of snow, three were buried in an avalanche that tore the mountain's face, a fourth lost hold of a ledge and fell headlong to his death, and at last the fifth —

(The mountain climber appears)

THE MOUNTAIN CLIMBER. Stumbled to the top, where, under a cold sun, I planted the flag of my beloved country. *(He salutes and sings)*

From scaling this here mountain
My heart it gallops like a nag.
But twice as fast, believe you me,
It thumps to see my country's flag.

NARRATOR. And down the mountain he tottered. An eagle, attracted by this colorful arrival, descended upon the flag.

FIRST EAGLE. I don't know what it is, but it certainly cheers things up around here. I wonder if it tastes as good as it looks.

NARRATOR. And he took a few nibbles.

FIRST EAGLE. No; this will never replace rabbit giblets. Let's see what happens if I nip it away from the stick it's attached to.

NARRATOR. Nip away he did, and the flag landed on one of his wings.

FIRST EAGLE. Gorgeous! Elegant!

NARRATOR. Just then another eagle flew by.

SECOND EAGLE. Hey Frizzle, what have you got there?

FIRST EAGLE. Oh, a new outfit, something stylish for my feathers.

NARRATOR. His friend was strongly impressed.

SECOND EAGLE. How did it come your way?

FIRST EAGLE. I hate to boast, but do you see that fellow all dressed up scrabbling down the mountain?

SECOND EAGLE. I do.

FIRST EAGLE. He brought it up specially for me.

SECOND EAGLE. Specially for you?

FIRST EAGLE. Can't you see?

NARRATOR. The other eagle could hardly deny the evidence. Word soon spread, and the happy bird draped in the flag became the most admired eagle of the range.

THE FAITHFUL GARDENER

Characters

Narrator
The Gardener
Death

NARRATOR. An old gardener was shearing and trimming a privet hedge in a nobleman's park, when, looking up from his work, he saw a dark figure standing beside him.

GARDENER. Who are you?

NARRATOR. Asked the gardener. And the figure replied...

DEATH. I am your death. Your time has come, gardener. I must take you away.

NARRATOR. For a few moments the old man was unable to speak. But then he said...

GARDENER. My hedge is unfinished. Look, I have evened it here as smooth as a baby's cheek, but yonder it is as wrinkled and rough as my own. Let me finish my work, it will not take me long; I wish to leave the park in order.

DEATH. Why care about leaving it in order? Presently, when I extend my long fingers into your old heart, you will have ceased to care.

GARDENER. I have been the duke's gardener for sixty years. What will he think of me if I leave him with a rough privet hedge?

DEATH. What will he think of you? Fool! I repeat that in another heartbeat there will be no *you* to care about privets and trimmings and masters.

GARDENER. But I care now! I care, I do! Let me finish my work!

DEATH. Gardener, I am finishing mine.

NARRATOR. And with his long fingers he took the gardener's life.

DEATH. For I come in *my* good time (*looking at the audience*), not yours, not yours.

THE FARMER, HIS SON AND HIS MULE

Characters

Narrator
The Farmer
The Farmer's Son
Four Philosophers

NARRATOR. A farmer had loaded two sacks of potatoes on his mule and left for the market-town, accompanied by his little son. After selling the potatoes, feeding the mule, and stopping at a tavern with his boy for a loaf of bread, a hunk of cheese and (for himself) a mug of ale, he spoke as follows...

FARMER. Son, the road home is a long one. As I'm feeling my age and a heaviness in my head, I'll ride our Meg till we reach the stone bridge over the creek. By that time I'll be my chipper self again, we'll change places, and it'll be your turn to ride her as far as the roadside chapel to Our Lady. After that, we'll reward old Meg for carrying our potatoes and you and me, and let her trot home light and easy on her own.

NARRATOR. The lad happily agreed, and so, I think, did the mule, who had her own way, after so many years spent together, of understanding her master. Homeward they went, with the farmer astride the mule and singing a ditty, and the boy walking at his side, now hopping on one foot, now on the other. Presently they came across a philosopher and his disciples who were walking toward that same market-town in order to participate in a national convention of sages that was taking place at the university.

FARMER (*raising his hat*). Gentlemen...

NARRATOR. Said the farmer, bending down from his mule. The philosopher was above answering, but he turned around to watch the farmer, the lad and the mule until they were out of earshot, and then he said to his disciples, who had, of course, turned around with him...

FIRST PHILOSOPHER. Here is a fine lesson in selfishness. The coarse-grained father, smelling of cheap beer, takes his ease on the mule, while the delicate boy must drag behind him on the gravel. Let

the child sweat! Let his soles bleed! The old ruffian is comfortable and that is all he cares about.

NARRATOR. Upon reaching the stone bridge over the creek about an hour later, the farmer got off the mule as promised and said to his son...

FARMER. Your turn, my boy! Let me seat you on old Meg. Oopsy-daisy, up you go!

NARRATOR. And off they went again, the farmer singing another ditty as he walked, and the mule in a good mood because of the lighter load he was now carrying. After another hour or so, they met a second philosopher on his way to the sages' convention. This one was alone, muttering aphorisms to himself.

FARMER (*raising his hat*). God be with you, sir.

NARRATOR. Again he received no reply, but the philosopher turned around to watch the little group moving off. Then he took out a note pad and scribbled...

SECOND PHILOSOPHER. The world has gone topsy-turvy at last. The child rides the mule, the old man trudges on foot. Soon, to complete the picture, the man will be carrying the beast on his shoulders.

NARRATOR. After reaching the chapel, where father and son crossed themselves and the mule uttered a pious bray, the farmer said...

FARMER. All right now, Meg has been a good girl; let's set her free; we'll walk on either side of her and try to reach home before sunset.

NARRATOR. Off they went again, the mule ambling contentedly, the farmer singing and the boy hopping now on one foot and now on the other. They were nearing home when they crossed the path of two more philosophers on their way to the convention.

FARMER (*raising his hat*). Gentlemen, I bid you a good evening.

NARRATOR. The same thing happened as before. The philosophers said nothing to the farmer, as they were in the middle of a disputation about Being and Essence, but both turned around to watch the little family down the road and away.

THIRD PHILOSOPHER. Remarkable sight. It teaches us that folly is congenital in mankind and education cannot root it out. Two supposedly rational creatures walk alongside a mule, and to neither, it seems, does the idea occur that one of them, or both, could ride the animal.

FOURTH PHILOSOPHER. For once, my friend, I regretfully agree with you.

NARRATOR. Presently the farmer and his son got home, stabled the mule, and sat themselves down to the dinner the farmer's wife had prepared. The boy had been itching to ask a question of his father.

BOY. Dad, who was all them fancy gentlemen you raised your hat to on our way home and who never said nothin' to us?

FARMER. They are philosophers, my lad.

BOY. Philosophers? What are they?

FARMER. Philosophers are folk who understand things which the likes of us ain't likely to ever fathom, and that's why, when I pass them on the road, I raise my hat, and so should you, my boy, when you grow old enough to wear one.

THE FLATTERED HIPPOPOTAMUS

Characters

Narrator
The Hippopotamus
The Crocodile

NARRATOR. The hippopotamus was delighted.

CROCODILE. What are you delighted about?

NARRATOR. Asked his best friend, the crocodile, who couldn't bear to see him so happy.

HIPPOPOTAMUS. Why, when the lion spoke to us last night on behalf of the pension for retired lions, he smiled at me and said in the hearing of all present: "Without Handsome Hippo's assistance, I am powerless here."

CROCODILE. Ha! I hate to disillusion you, my dear friend, but you make me laugh. Handsome Hippo! Are you truly taken in by this obvious piece of flattery?

HIPPOPOTAMUS. No, I am not. I am not flattered by what the lion said; but I am flattered to be the one he chose to flatter.

A FLEA PROTESTS

Characters

Narrator
The Dog
The Flea

DOG. I despise you.

NARRATOR. So said the dog to the flea as he lifted his indignant rear leg to scratch his flank.

DOG. You parasite!

NARRATOR. The flea happened to be a reasoner.

FLEA. You call me a parasite...

NARRATOR. He squeaked from behind a tuft of bristles which the dog could not reach...

FLEA. But don't you live off rabbits, don't cats live off mice, don't people live off chickens, don't lions live off zebras? Why does everybody hate us so?

NARRATOR. Unfortunately, the dog was a reasoner too.

DOG. We despise you because you live off those who are bigger and stronger than yourself. That makes you a parasite. We live off those who are smaller and weaker than us. That makes us normal.

NARRATOR. What could the flea reply? Rules are made by rulers. The rulers get the pretty names, and those who bother the rulers get the ugly ones.

THE FOX AND THE CROW

Characters

Narrator
The Fox
The Crow

NARRATOR. A crow was sitting on a branch with a cheese in his bill when a hungry fox, drawn by the smell, stopped under the tree and spoke as follows...

FOX. Master Crow, the beauty of your voice has enthralled me for many a year. I have never before dared to speak up. I am shy in the presence of a master, but how grateful I should be if you deigned to sing me a brief ditty!

NARRATOR. This was the most attractive speech the crow had ever heard. He opened his beak, dropped the cheese, and krawked his uttermost, high, middle, and low.

(The fox applauds)

FOX. Bravo! Enchanting!

NARRATOR. Our fox didn't like to make enemies.

FOX. My eyes are filled with tears. But — what is this on the grass?

CROW. This? Oh, it's a cheese; I was about —

FOX. A cheese? Ye gods! A greasy Gorgondola! It must not beslabber your windpipe! *(He swallows it)* There. I have removed the temptation. Your voice is saved.

CROW. You mean it? Thanks a million, mister Fox.

FOX. It is for me to thank *you*, o precious friend. You have given me everything I came for. Farewell!

CROW. Good-bye! It was nice meeting you.

FOX. A feast! *(Exit)*

NARRATOR. The fox was chuckling under his breath. But wait! The crow was happy too...

CROW. Caw! Caw!

NARRATOR. And why not? The fox had won a savory meal, the crow a delicious compliment. And neither is easy to come by in this world.

HANK THE SALESMAN

Characters

Narrator
The President
The Chairman
First Director
Second Director
Third Director

NARRATOR. Above all the salesmen working for him, the President of the company loved and prized a man whose name was Hank. Hank had eyes that made the ladies dream of naughty adventures in ancient Samarkand. Beneath his comely nose a long black moustache pointed to the right and left like a pair of wings. His hair was curly and neatly trimmed around his well-washed ears, his cheekbones looked like small ruddy apples, and his arms seemed to have been forged to carry the helpless out of fireswept buildings. He was, furthermore, a man of merry monologue who believed in the quality of the product his company sold (alas, I have forgotten what this was) —

PRESIDENT. Tiger Detergent: the Suds that Roar into Dirt.

NARRATOR. Thank you, Mr. Weamish. Well, Hank believed in Tiger Detergent as devoutly as the Pope believes in almighty God. As a result, he scoured his territory like a conqueror, selling more boxes of the product than anyone the company had ever employed. No wonder he was the President's favorite...

PRESIDENT. Oh Hank!

NARRATOR. And the darling of all the Directors too. And no wonder, either, that one morning, as the meeting of the Board of Directors was getting under way, the Chairman of the Board confronted the President with rage exploding in face, gestures and words.

CHAIRMAN (*thundering*). The news has come to me that our President has fired Hank. Why, Mr. Weamish, did you fire Hank?

NARRATOR. The Board was dumbfounded. The President said lividly nothing.

CHAIRMAN (*shouting*). Why, why, why? What made you do it?

NARRATOR. And still the President was silent. But now the Board was finding its voice.

FIRST DIRECTOR. Confess...

NARRATOR. Said one director.

FIRST DIRECTOR. Wasn't it envy? Was Hank too successful? Did he steal the sunlight from you?

PRESIDENT. Oh no! I? I envy Hank? I who admired him so? I who gave him raise after raise?

SECOND DIRECTOR. What then?

NARRATOR. Asked another director.

SECOND DIRECTOR. Did he debauch the typists?

PRESIDENT. He did; but that was stipulated in his contract.

NARRATOR. As you can see, he was beginning to weep. Another director spoke up.

THIRD DIRECTOR. Did he peculate and malversate?

PRESIDENT (*blubbing*). Hank malversate or peculate? Hank? Oh Hank, you who lunched on yogurt when you traveled in order to save the company's pennies! I never knew a boy as honest as you, except my grandmother in heaven.

NARRATOR. The chairman was losing patience.

CHAIRMAN (*bawling*). Enough! Mr. Weamish: you fired our most brilliant salesman, though you knew that the competition was after him day in day out with offers I myself couldn't have resisted. One last time, tell us the cause, or else you in turn — the rest is blank, but as you all know, my silences are even more terrible than my howls.

PRESIDENT (*whispering*). Mister Chairman, forgive me, but you named the cause yourself.

CHAIRMAN. Fiddlesticks! Where? When?

PRESIDENT. The offers from our competitors.... Every day a new one, grander than the last.... Oh, I was so afraid that he was about to leave us.... so nervous, so terrified....

CHAIRMAN. That you fired him?

PRESIDENT. That I fired him.

NARRATOR. And there my story ends. Hank, as you might guess, went on to sell innumerable units of the next product...

PRESIDENT (*wretchedly*). Goop Brothers Miracle Fertilizer: The Dirt That Grows on You.

NARRATOR. While the President was condemned to wrap parcels with twine and tape in the stockroom. There, for years to come, he would impart to newcomers and old-timers alike a settled conviction of his...

PRESIDENT (*old man wrapping a box*). Let me tell you that doing mischief in order to prevent it is a very sad mistake. Another stretch of tape, my boy.

HOW GOD BESTED THE DEVIL

Characters

Narrator
The Devil
God
The Physicist
The General

NARRATOR. Some people believe that the devil is busy night and day tormenting mankind. But that's a pretty medieval way of thinking. Actually, the devil turned the whole machinery on, so to speak, right from the start; I mean, he made people as ornery as he could and then he left them to their own devices. Now and then he lands here to make sure that everything is going wrong, but then he goes about his interests elsewhere, or else between trips he relaxes on the homestead in Gehenna.

On one of his tours on earth the devil happened into the troposphere just when a few physicists and generals were trying out a hydrogen bomb.

DEVIL. (*Explosion*) What in blazes is this? (*Explosion*) Fantastic! My hair's on fire and every bone in my body is broken. This is better than the time Woozis exploded and every pottlewibblet on it was exterminated.

NARRATOR. But the devil's a tough piece of steak as you can imagine, so the jolt didn't shake him for long, and down he went to talk to the generals and the physicists.

DEVIL. Something new is cooking, I see.

PHYSICIST. Yes...

NARRATOR. Said the chief physicist...

PHYSICIST. We're pretty proud of it, it's a ball of fire.

DEVIL. Tell me all about it.

NARRATOR. So the physicist gave him the lecture.

PHYSICIST. Hydrogen isotopes, tritium and deuterium, critical mass, self-sustaining reactions, annihilation of matter...

DEVIL. Excellent, excellent. Here's the Nobel Peace Prize. (*The physicist pockets the money*) But what do you propose to do with it? Seems a pity just to let it drift.

NARRATOR. A general chimed in.

GENERAL. Don't worry, sir; we've got plans to blow the stuffings out of the enemy and to leave nary a child standing up to tell the tale. That'll teach them to be nice to us.

DEVIL. Lovely, lovely; but are they going to wait for you without playing a trick or two of their own I hope?

GENERAL. No sir; you can rely on those hooligans; they intend to split each freedom-loving one of us from tip to top to punish us for our free enterprise.

NARRATOR. At that point the devil became a little worried.

DEVIL. Tell me, what about the rest of the world?

GENERAL. What rest? There ain't no rest on *my* radar screen. No sir, the only life that's going to be left is where people were never ornery at all and just live. You know. Just sit around and live. With geranium pots. Of course, I don't know who they are.

DEVIL. Neither do I!

NARRATOR. The devil was in a black panic that was a pity to see. The truth is, Lucifer needs people for his mischief, because there's no such thing as disembodied mischief, mischief is absolutely void until it gets into living creatures. So the devil flew like a bullet to the mansion of the lord, where he didn't even announce himself...

DEVIL. Out of my way, you flunkys...

NARRATOR. He just plunged in and broke into God's private cabinet.

DEVIL. Murder! It's murder! It's massacre! It's a plot against me, and don't tell me it isn't, I ought to know a plot when I see one, and what in hell am I going to do without people?

NARRATOR. The lord chuckled. He'd never seen Lucifer in such a broil.

GOD. At last! At last and at long last I have found the way of besting you. The forces of evil are smashed. Hang up your pitchfork, Satan, I've outsmarted you, I'm almighty after all.

DEVIL. You mean —— ?

GOD. I do. From now on, it's cosmic dust for you. Enjoy it if you can.

NARRATOR. And that is the story of how the devil had to quit the earth forever.

HOW GOD LEARNED WHAT MEASURE IS

Characters

Narrator
God
Gabriel
Abel
Cain

NARRATOR. When Jehovah began his career, he really enjoyed tossing his mighty thunderbolt around.

GOD. The point, my dear Gabriel, is that I have standards.

GABRIEL. Yes, your infinity.

GOD. In fact, and this is a mystery I don't impart to the first-come archangel, me and the idea of standards erupted together out of nothing: we *were* the Big Bang.

GABRIEL. Yes, your magnipotence.

GOD. And ever since, I've zoomed and zapped about the universe making my standards stick. Here on earth, for example — (*he tosses his thunderbolt*)¹

GABRIEL. What was it this time, my lord?

GOD. You didn't notice?

GABRIEL. No, your splendor.

GOD. That, Gabriel, was a rebellious electron.

GABRIEL. How did it sin, your excellence?

GOD. It refused to whirl. It stood and dawdled. Look closer.

GABRIEL. Heavenly angels! It's whirling like mad! But, my liege, wouldn't a poke with your pinky have sufficed? Because—

GOD. Wait! (*He tosses the thunderbolt*). While you were admiring that particle —

GABRIEL. No, I noticed, I noticed! That pebble falling up instead of down! When you bashed it, it stopped mid-air in the silliest way I ever saw, and did it ever turn around and fall down!

¹ Gabriel will be picking up the bolt each time, and returning it to God when needed.

GOD. The rules, you see.

GABRIEL. Still, wouldn't a word — a simple word from you — because your thunderbolt — for instance, this little caterpillar —

GOD. What about it? Let me take a look. No!

GABRIEL. Alas!

GOD. Dummy! You're supposed to eat that leaf, *it* isn't supposed to eat you! (*He hurls the thunderbolt*). Report to me, Gabriel.

GABRIEL. All I can say about that geranium leaf, your majesty, is that it was.

GOD. God be praised, forever and ever, amen. But who comes here?

GABRIEL. Your friends, Abel and Cain.

GOD. My masterpieces. I hope they at least will behave. Let's become invisible.

(Enter Abel and Cain)

ABEL. I can't help it, my sweet brother, if my burnt offering to our Father and Lord sent its smoke straight up into the sky, while yours fizzled and sputtered and sent the smoke into your eyes.

CAIN. My eyes are clear enough to see a scoundrel who fools with my burnt offering every time it's time for one.

ABEL. And where is this scoundrel, my sweet brother? Aside from our aged parents, there is only you and me in the whole wide world.

CAIN. And in a second, me will be all. (*He strikes Abel*) That will teach you to be funny.

ABEL. Jehovah, avenge me! (*Cain drags Abel's corpse off-stage*)

GOD. Did you see that?

GABRIEL (*sobbing*). I did, I did; it's the worst, the vilest, the cruelest —

GOD. This, Gabriel, calls for a punishment like none I've ever inflicted. Hand me my thunderbolt!

GABRIEL. Oh, your grandeur, your thunderbolt is so worn out with use —

GOD. Is this the time to criticize?

(He flings his thunderbolt. A yell off-stage)

GOD. It didn't kill him though. It was worn.

GABRIEL. I feel weak...

(He sits heavily down and jumps up again)

GABRIEL. My lord!

GOD. What now?

GABRIEL. Nothing, your magnificence, but sitting down — or trying to — well — the grass wouldn't bend under me. It — how shall I put it with sufficient dignity — it stung — my —

GOD. Curse this earth! Fetch me my — give me my tweezers, Gabriel.

GABRIEL. Tweezers should do it nicely, your immensity.

(God works at the grass)

GOD. Thunderbolt for Cain; tweezers for grass: make a note of that, Gabriel.

THE INNOVATION

Characters

Narrator

First Farmer

Second Farmer

NARRATOR. Two farmers were looking at a strange new apple tree.

FIRST FARMER (*scratching his head*). Sure is the oddest apple tree I ever run up against.

SECOND FARMER. My landlord invented it. He's a famous experimentalizer with ten framed diplomas on the wall.

FIRST FARMER. Who ever seen an apple tree with a purple trunk?

SECOND FARMER. Nobody, that's who. And instead o' leaves it grows feathers.

FIRST FARMER. *Yeller* feathers! And dang me if the apples ain't square instead o' round!

SECOND FARMER. Yep, they're uncommon all right. Try one. Nice and ripe.

FIRST FARMER. Thanks. Ouch! I'm bleedin'!

SECOND FARMER. Yep, cuts your lips like a razor.

FIRST FARMER. Not much of a tree, I guess.

SECOND FARMER. Not much of a tree? What do you mean, not much of a tree! Don't tell me *you* could have growed it!

FIRST FARMER. Nope, I couldn't. I'm stoopid; and some jackass notions it takes a genius to dream up.

THE JOURNEY OF A COW

Characters

Narrator
The Philosophical Cow
The Carinthian Cow
The Indian Cow
The Indian

NARRATOR. In a charming meadow of lower Carinthia the cows were feasting on the sappy grass with joy in their souls.

CARINTHIAN COW. And why not? There's no better meadow in the world, no jollier cowherd, no friskier dog, and no happier fate. Most of the day we eat dinner, from time to time we take a walk — two steps or three — and then we lie down for a sunbath and a sleepy friendly confabulation.

NARRATOR. One of these cows, however, was a different sort. She had acquired a little philosophy, I don't know where, and this had got her to grumbling a good deal about life, and also — to speak the whole truth — about death. Now and then she would allow the other cows to overhear her thoughts.

PHILOSOPHICAL COW. Oh sisters, sisters, I admire your serenity, I envy your bliss. Do you think that this cowherd, whose face you lick, and for whose handpats you compete, bestows his good will on you because he loves you? I am sorry indeed to disabuse you, I wish I could leave you ruminating with a grateful heart, but you must be told that this cowherd and his rich employer are merely fattening you for the kill. The kill, my sisters! For your death! You listen complacently to the bells around your necks, but these bells do not peal for you; they peal to cheer the cowherd; for you there is only the eternal nothing; and yet you graze, you smile, you grow fat in order to be condemned the sooner, and you dare to be happy!

NARRATOR. The other cows listened as carefully as they could, but it is not easy to pay close attention to metaphysics on a full stomach, and these cows had a full stomach most of the time.

CARINTHIAN COW. Thank you, dear... You're telling us awful things we shouldn't forget...It's so very sweet of you to want to keep

them from us... But you know best... How beautifully you talk!... I always say, education is a wonderful thing... On the other hand, the grass *is* luscious, and as for the cowherd, well, he's always been a gentleman to me. It's time for our nap now, but as soon as we wake up, or maybe after dinner, we want to chew over all the stories you told us.

PHILOSOPHICAL COW (*to herself*). These animals are hopeless. I must look out for myself. Each cow is alone in her universe. We can only make a pretense of communicating. We moo in the void. One of these days I shall go to India, where cows, I hear, are worshipped instead of broiled.

NARRATOR. She revolved this notion in her mind for a long time, and even inquired of a flock of migrant geese in what direction India lay. And then, one morning, when her companions looked more paunchy than the philosophic mind could bear, she set out without farewells on the long and dangerous road to India.

PHILOSOPHICAL COW. I took the side roads, ate the wild grass along their borders, slept among strange herds in alien fields, but I advanced with a hopeful heart through the dust, the cold, the windstorms, the rain, the heat, I don't know how many months or years, until at last I came to a village, look! a village in which the cows are roaming at will in the streets, without a dog to bark at them or a herdsman to march them back and forth!

NARRATOR. And she asked joyously of the first cow who crossed her path...

PHILOSOPHICAL COW. Am I in India?

NARRATOR. The Indian cow, who was pale and thin, and walked slowly with lowered head, looked up in surprise.

INDIAN COW. Poor wretch, you are. But you — where do you come from? Because one look at your girth is enough to tell me that you are not one of us.

PHILOSOPHICAL COW. I come from Carinthia.

INDIAN COW. Carinthia? I don't know where that is, but oh it must be heaven. You are the chubbiest cheeriest cow I have seen in my whole fly-bitten life. (*She sobs*)

PHILOSOPHICAL COW. What's the matter with you? Why are you crying? I came here to live among you. In Carinthia men fatten us for the slaughterhouse, we die butchered in the flower of our youth. I

came here to be a goddess and to live out in peace the years which nature counted out to me.

NARRATOR. Before her new friend could answer, a man with a stick approached.

INDIAN COW. Run, run! I'm too weak, but you can run before he beats you half to death!

NARRATOR. But it was too late. The man swung his stick.

INDIAN. Out of the way, you loafers! Here! Here! Here! (*He beats them*)

NARRATOR. Our cow had never been struck, so now she dodged this way and that, her head in a whirl, mooing bitterly at each blow, until she found herself in another street, where the man didn't bother to pursue her. After she had recovered herself a little, she looked for her companion among the other cows in the street; and in fact the Indian cow painfully rejoined her after a while.

PHILOSOPHICAL COW. What happened? Why did the man beat us? And why does everybody look as sick as you? I see nothing but skin and bones and drooping muzzles! Was it all a mistake? Are you not goddesses after all? Was I misled?

INDIAN COW. No, you were not misled, my dear; but when goddesses swarm in their thousands, even goddesses starve. If we chance on a rich man's field, his servants fall on us with sticks. If we walk in people's way, they beat us breathless. So we return broken-hearted to our daily stubble, rice husks, and refuse which the very beetles disdain. Once in a long while our worshippers squeeze three drops of milk from our wrinkled udders. They love our dung better than our souls. They groan when we are too weak to give them a baby ox. At long last we drop with our jowls to the earth, and expire knowing that our hides will be turned into common purses. Let them! But shall I die of old age without once curling my tongue around a plentiful meal like the thousands, forgive me for weeping, the thousands you have surely enjoyed?

NARRATOR. The philosophical cow was dumbfounded. For many a day she said nothing, only snatching at a tuft of grass now and then, and, because she was stronger than the others, shoving them away from the better morsels.

PHILOSOPHICAL COW. Shoving them away? Oh God, in Carinthia we invited each other to partake! What shall I do? What shall I do? Shall I remain where I am, live out my natural life as a

goddess but live it out in misery? Or return to the bliss of Carinthia,
so sure but ever so brief?

NARRATOR. I have heard that she is in India to this day debating
with herself, because she cannot decide. And neither can I.

KUKKURRIK TRIUMPHANT

Characters

Narrator
Kukkurrik
The Chiffchaff

KUKKURRIK. Kukkurikkukkurriku!

NARRATOR. Every day before dawn, the rooster Kukkurrik uttered a mighty volley of crows, watched the sun come up, and said to himself...

KUKKURRIK. I've done it again!

NARRATOR. For he believed that his crowing made the sun rise. Once, however, it happened that his chum, the chiffchaff, risen from his twigs before his usual time, overheard Kukkurrik.

CHIFFCHAFF. What d'you mean, "I've done it again." What've you done again?

KUKKURRIK. It's really none of your business, little friend, because my sacred mission in life is my private affair.

CHIFFCHAFF. What sacred mission?

KUKKURRIK. Making the sun rise every morning. There! You've wormed the truth out of me.

NARRATOR. The chiffchaff ought to have been impressed, but...

CHIFFCHAFF. You superstitious henpecker, you arrogant eggnog — *you* bring out the sun? Ha, ha, ha! Go on and prove it to me.

KUKKURRIK. I don't know why I should bother; but even a fool like you must have heard of logic.

CHIFFCHAFF. Logic?

KUKKURRIK. Yes, logic. Every morning I crow, and every morning, as soon as I have finished crowing, the sun rises. Cause and effect. Logic. Ergo probatus est.

CHIFFCHAFF. It so happens that the sun comes out in the morning because a god, whose name if you please is Fibbus, takes it out for a ride. Did you say logic? I drank FACTS with my mother's milk.

NARRATOR. And there the quarrel ended, because the sweet voice of his favorite hen was calling Kukkurrik to business.

KUKKURRIK. Coming, dearest...

NARRATOR. One winter night, however, Kukkurrik and that same hen (her name was Mistress Pertelote) had a falling out, and Kukkurrik left her roost in a huff.

KUKKURRIK. Women!

NARRATOR. It was long past midnight and very frosty, and poor Kukkurrik caught a ferocious cold. He could feel the fever burning up his lungs, his head was in a whirl, he coughed grit and gravel, he cursed Mistress Pertelote...

KUKKURRIK. I've spoiled the little —

NARRATOR. And, as the time to crow came on, he found that he couldn't bring out so much as a semiquaver.

(Kukkurrik tries)

KUKKURRIK. I don't care; it'll be dark for once.

NARRATOR. And he staggered up his loft, where he fell into a deep sleep. Hours later, the chiffchaff woke him up. It was bright day.

CHIFFCHAFF. Friend Kukkurrik, wake up, it's me, your best friend, you've been furiously sick, your wives tell me you couldn't crow, and yet here's the blissful sun blushing all over the world, and to add insult to infamy, there's not a cloud to be seen from poop to stern.

KUKKURRIK *(half asleep)*. What's that?

CHIFFCHAFF *(shouting into Kukkurrik's ear)*. You didn't crow and the sun is up! Pray explicate.

NARRATOR. He thought the hour of victory had struck and the Fibbus hypothesis was confirmed forever. But not at all!

KUKKURRIK *(in a hoarse whisper)*. I guess — I guess — I crowed so long yesterday that it carried for two days.

CHIFFCHAFF. I'll be damned!

KUKKURRIK *(coughing and wheezing)*. In fact — I wouldn't be surprised — if I lasted the sun — a week.

(Exit, chuckling)

NARRATOR. And he left the chiffchaff agape at the compelling power of logic.

LANDSCAPE WITH CLOUD AND DUNES

Characters

Narrator
The Cloud
The Wind
First Dune
Second Dune
Third Dune
The Cactus
The Rock

NARRATOR. A benevolent cloud which had spent its life wandering above tender meadows and fruitful valleys turned one day to the wind with the following surprising words.

CLOUD. I am sick at heart, oh my friend. The world is not all tender meadow and fruitful valley. I have had glimpses, in the farthest distance, of a wretched desert deprived of all life except a few bristles of heartless vegetation. Send me, I beg you, to that pitiful sand; I have in me rain, milk, blood, call it what you will, to bring the desert to life.

WIND. Think twice, my sweet friend. Not in a hundred years have I driven a cloud over the barren region you're speaking of. Why choose to hover over a desert instead of billowing gracefully above green grass and buttercups?

CLOUD. I am different. The grass and the buttercups do not need me. The poor desert does. Lead me to the desert, my friendly wind.

NARRATOR. The wind, who is an intelligent spirit, said nothing more, and blew soft and steady until the cloud had her wish and stood high over a burning tract of dunes that seemed never to end. The dunes looked up in horror.

FIRST DUNE. What is this thing?

NARRATOR. Cried the highest of them, as if choking in its sand. The wind replied...

WIND. What you see there is a cloud.

ALL THE DUNES (*with hatred*). A cloud, a cloud, a cloud!

FIRST DUNE. What are you looking for, stupid cloud? You're sitting on our sun. Don't bully us. Go home!

CLOUD. Gently. I am your sister. I have come to quench your terrible thirst. I am here to die for you. And afterward, you will turn to grass and trees, to fruit, to fountains and brooks, to barley, wheat and corn.

NARRATOR. A heap of sand replied...

SECOND DUNE. Nobody is thirsty here. Die for somebody else!

NARRATOR. A cactus shouted defiance...

CACTUS. Take your barley to the North Pole!

NARRATOR. A half-buried rock bawled upward...

ROCK. Ugly bundle of fumes, we'll burn up your rain if you dare to touch us.

NARRATOR. And a hiss came from a cunning little dune.

THIRD DUNE. Wind, wind, blow up a nasty storm, whisk us aloft, we'll scratch her face and blot out her rain.

NARRATOR. Such, and rougher, were their words, which the kindly wind tried in vain to scatter. For a few hours, the cloud moved about undecided; but finally she turned to the wind and said...

CLOUD. Guide me back to the land of meadows, my friend. Ah bitterness: the desert is the desert it wants to be.

THE LUCKY PEBBLE

Characters

Narrator
Robin
Colin
The Prince

NARRATOR. Two peasant lads named Robin and Colin were sitting at the edge of a footpath, chewing grass and tossing pebbles into the meadow which lay before them. One of Robin's pebbles happened to strike a hunter who was asleep behind a clump of bushes. The hunter gave a cry...

PRINCE. Ouch! Hey!

NARRATOR. Leaped up, and strode toward the boys.

PRINCE. Who threw that pebble? I demand to know who flung that pebble!

NARRATOR. The two boys were terrified.

COLIN. He threw it, sir.

ROBIN (*at the same time, but piteously*). I threw it, sir.

PRINCE. Wonderful boy! You saved my life! Look at me; don't you recognize me? I am none other than your Prince. I was pursuing a fox with my retinue, but I galloped so nobly that I lost my way. Exhausted, I lay down and fell asleep. Your blessed pebble woke me. I saw a deadly snake on my breast ready to strike. I killed it, and thanks to you, my dearest and patriotic boy, our country will continue to rejoice in my rule.

ROBIN. I was glad to do it, sir.

PRINCE. I know you were, o charming and loyal youth. All the same, I intend to reward you. What is it you would like of me? Name anything within reason.

ROBIN. A sling maybe?

PRINCE (*laughing*). You will have a sling of ivory with a golden handle. But in addition, I will take you to my palace forthwith; I will ennoble your parents (if any) and give them twenty thousand ducats

for vestments and furnishings; and when you grow up, I shall make you Captain of my Dragoons.

ROBIN. Sounds yummy.

PRINCE. Come, mount my steed behind me.

NARRATOR. For, I am happy to report, the Prince's horse had been grazing nearby.

PRINCE. And let us rejoin the hunting party — frantic, I am sure, because of my absence.

NARRATOR. However, as they were about to gallop away, Colin tugged at the Prince's spur, which he could just reach.

COLIN. What about me? I was throwing pebbles too!

NARRATOR. The Prince nipped his spur out of Colin's reach.

PRINCE. How *dare* you compare your vulgar pebble-throwing with his? *(To Robin)* Your playmate has shifty eyes.

ROBIN. Upstart! *(He pulls his tongue)*

NARRATOR. And the horse sped off, covering Colin in a great cloud of dust. What remains to be said? Colin went home to spend the rest of his living days planting turnips and beans, and Robin grew up to become a rich, pampered, and dreaded Captain of Dragoons.

THE LUNATIC PIGEON

Characters

Narrator
First Pigeon
Second Pigeon
Third Pigeon

NARRATOR. Two tubby pigeons were sitting on the gravel in a park, when a third one came strolling by.

THIRD PIGEON. What happiness it is to possess a magnificent tail like mine!..

NARRATOR. Said the newcomer.

FIRST PIGEON. Magnificent tail?

SECOND PIGEON. What magnificent tail?

THIRD PIGEON. Look behind me. Behold the luminous expanse of green and blue.

NARRATOR. And now he began to strut about the gravel, wagging his bare little behind.

THIRD PIGEON. Admire if you please the shimmering discs, praised by the better poets.

FIRST PIGEON. You are out of your small mind. The tail you are talking about belongs to the peacocks who live in the park with us. I wish you could turn your head and look at your own rear.

THIRD PIGEON. So do I; but my consolation is that I can watch the children who surround me, hoping to catch one of my feathers. I take delight in their innocent pleasure.

NARRATOR. The two other pigeons stared at each other, excused themselves, and walked away.

SECOND PIGEON. Strange lunacy...

NARRATOR. Said one of the normal pigeons.

FIRST PIGEON. All the stranger...

NARRATOR. The other normal pigeon added...

FIRST PIGEON. When you consider that just as God made us, and never mind these useless peacocks, we pigeons are the most bewitching birds in the world.

SECOND PIGEON. As everybody knows.

THE MOTH WHO DISGUISED HIMSELF AS A DRAGON

Characters

Narrator
The Moth
The Snail
The Grasshopper
The Horsefly
The Bluejay
The Owl

NARRATOR. Said the moth to himself one day...

MOTH. Why did Mistress Nature make us so very frail, I wonder? We're at the mercy of a thousand large and brutal animals, like titmice and chickadees, that fly faster than we do, and have teeth and claws to torment us with. Thank God, *I'm nobody's fool*, I've evolved and painted huge dragon's eyes and stripes on my wings. I hope they work.

NARRATOR. He didn't wait long to find out.

MOTH. Stand aside. Here's a snail I want to send galloping away. Boooo! (*He rushes at the snail, spits, and displays his wings*)

SNAIL. What in blazes—? (*Rolls off-stage*)

NARRATOR. Bravo! The snail sucked his head back into his shell so fast, he rolled all the way down the hill. The sight of that dragon took five years off his life.

MOTH (*chuckling*). Pretty good for a beginning. Aha! There's a grasshopper. Out, out, brave wings! Boooo!

GRASSHOPPER. Help!

NARRATOR. The poor beast leaped seven feet over a fence, never to be heard from again.

MOTH. Here comes a bully horsefly. Boooo!

HORSEFLY (*making the sign of the cross*). Jesus protect me!
(*He flees; a thump is heard off-stage*)

MOTH. Heart attack. Better and better.

NARRATOR. But finally came the real test, in the shape of a hungry bluejay.

BLUEJAY. Twiddle, twiddle! Ha, what's this? An insect, brand unknown, but I'll make an antipasto of him all the same. Here goes my world-famous indirect dive.

NARRATOR. But the moth was ready.

MOTH. Now or never.

NARRATOR. At twelve inches, out went the wings, the ghastly eyes stared at the bluejay like a fiend out of hell—

MOTH. Boooo!

NARRATOR. The bird stopped dead in the air—

BLUEJAY. Damn!

NARRATOR. And vanished over the horizon, pursued by the moth.

MOTH. I'll find you, twiddle-beak! (*Exit*)

NARRATOR. It was a triumph on every front. Presently the moth became the terror of the neighborhood. (*Reenter moth*) He grew fat, as befits the terror of a neighborhood, and became reconciled to the workings of Mistress Nature.

MOTH. It isn't size that counts; it's brains.

NARRATOR. After a while, he took to frightening the larger birds, and even cats and dogs, for the sheer sassy sport of it.

MOTH. Test the limit, man, test the limit.

NARRATOR. He'd creep up on a pigeon or a schnautzer, erect his monstrous wings, and go...

MOTH. Boooo!

NARRATOR. It never failed, and the moth grew ever fatter and sassier. One day, however, he ran up against an owl, which is a bird that doesn't see much of anything, at least in daytime. Only the moth didn't know it, so he thought he'd have one more laugh.

MOTH. Another feather in my cap.

(*He stalks the owl*)

NARRATOR. Watch him maneuver. The wings are about to spring.

MOTH. Boooo!

NARRATOR. Well, the owl was half asleep, but the sound interested him.

OWL. Eh?

NARRATOR. And he opened his eyes in a tiny slit. All he saw, though, was a blur.

OWL. Who goes there in the shimmering sun?

MOTH. Boooo!

NARRATOR. Owls, it so happens, work mostly by ear.

OWL. Would you mind repeating?....

MOTH. Boooo!

NARRATOR. That last booo did it. The owl made a dart...

OWL. Gulp!

NARRATOR. And gobbled up the disappointed moth, whose last thought upon this earth was...

MOTH. Ye gods, I must have slipped.

NARRATOR. And indeed, one usually does in the end.

THE NAMELESS TREE

Characters

Narrator
The Pine Tree
The Nameless Tree

NARRATOR. In a faraway corner of the world which no human being has ever visited, there flourished a species of trees which, as no one has ever seen them, I'm unable to describe to you, though I like to imagine them as thick cabbages sitting on long trunks, and why not? I do know, however, that one day a seedling was wafted into their midst from western Oregon. The seedling rooted itself next to one of these trees, and it too flourished. First a sapling came up, and then, many years later, a pine tree mature enough to know the rules of civility and to greet its neighbor with a mellow...

PINE TREE. Good morning to you, neighbor!

NARRATOR. The tree it thus addressed responded with an equally cordial...

NAMELESS TREE. And a sunny day to you, young growth. It's been my pleasure to watch you pushing up season after season. Now that you've reached ripeness and wisdom, let me wish you hundreds more years of the same.

PINE TREE. How very kind of you...

NARRATOR. Exclaimed the pine tree.

PINE TREE. I owe it to you to introduce myself: I am a pine tree, at your service. And you, my friend?

NAMELESS TREE. And I? I am who I am. What else can I say?

PINE TREE. Forgive me! I was simply asking for your name, without intending, I assure you, to press beyond the margin of a decent curiosity.

NAMELESS TREE. Your curiosity is welcome, but I know nothing about names; what is a name?

NARRATOR. The pine tree was surprised.

PINE TREE. A name is, well, a name, something you call something. As I told you, I am not only a tree, like you, I am a pine

tree, as they say in Oregon, or a *Tannenbaum* in German, or, better still, a *Pinus ponderosa* in Latin.

NARRATOR. At this point it was the native's turn to be surprised.

NAMELESS TREE. Alas, I am nothing but what you see, and so are my relatives who live all around us. We have no names that I know of. Tell me, what good are names?

PINE TREE. I'm not sure, but I can inform you that without a name, one doesn't know who or what one is; perhaps one doesn't even altogether exist—if you'll forgive my mentioning it.

NAMELESS TREE . How very awful; and I suppose that if you lack a name you stop growing, you lose your leaves, your roots wither, and the creatures give up on you and fly elsewhere?

PINE TREE. Oh no! Please don't be frightened! No such thing! Just look at yourself! Any mother-tree would be proud to call you her own!

NAMELESS TREE. Then may I be your friend without a name?

PINE TREE. You may be and you are...

NARRATOR. Said the pine tree, shaking all his needles.

PINE TREE. Besides, I give you permission to forget mine; for the more I gaze at your head of leaves, the more I feel that I too shall prosper without it.

THE OWL WHO DIDN'T LIKE LONG NECKS

Characters

Narrator
The Stork
The Goose
The Owl

NARRATOR. In their Academy of Science, on the shore of a pretty lagoon, the animals were debating the question of long necks. The stork, it turned out, was an expert on the subject.

STORK. Briefly, fellow members of the Academy: by means of a long neck we can keep our bodies in place and send our faces ahead to look for worms and frogs practically anywhere we like. We can graze in every direction there is, we can peck our own tails clean—if I may say so without offense—we can rest our weary cheeks on our own bosoms, and best of all, we can enjoy our meals longer, for it takes a morsel a prodigious time to travel down the *oesophagus* into the *stomachus*, vulgarly known as stomach.

NARRATOR. In my opinion it was a good and scholarly speech. But suddenly a noise was heard in the reeds. A silly goose who had eavesdropped on the proceedings was madly clapping her wings. The stork's discourse had quite carried her away.

GOOSE. Honk honk! Me too! Honk honk! Me too I like long necks—honk honk!

NARRATOR. It was most embarrassing for the stork. And now the owl spoke up. He hadn't liked the speech about long necks for reasons of his own.

OWL (*sarcastically*). I for one do not see eye to eye with a goose, but I am glad that our esteemed colleague has found someone—unacceptable to the Academy, to be sure—to honk in support of his theories.

NARRATOR. All the Academicians snickered except the stork, who

blushed to the tip of his beak, and found his way to the exit while the animals decided unanimously in favor of short necks. For a goose can be as right as Aristotle, but no one cares to be right in her company.

THE PARLIAMENT OF ANIMALS

Characters

Narrator
The Rabbit
The Uncle
The Lion
The Elephant
The Bear
The Cobra

NARRATOR. The white rabbit was showing his country off to his uncle who lived across the river. He took his uncle to the Parliament of Animals, where they crouched in the gallery with the other small creatures while the leaders of the animals spoke and debated.

UNCLE. What a glorious institution you are showing me...

NARRATOR. Said the uncle.

UNCLE. All these wonderful animals speaking their minds! On our side it's hold your snout or else. Look at that majestic lion in the center!

RABBIT (*proudly*). He's our king, yet all king that he is, we tell him off any hour of the day. But hush up now; the session is about to start. Here comes our dear elephant.

NARRATOR. And indeed, an elephant was lumbering to the rostrum, where he trumpeted a greeting, and said...

ELEPHANT. Mr. Lion, king or no king, I am sick of your reckless policy of cutting down banana trees, and I demand drastic reforms.

UNCLE (*whispering*). Oh my God, now surely a pride of lions is going to tear the poor elephant to shreds.

RABBIT. Not in the least, the elephant can say whatever he pleases.

UNCLE. Can he? Can he?

NARRATOR. And his nephew was right, for the lion replied...

LION. I am making a note of your interesting objurgation, Lord Tusky.

NARRATOR. The elephant having returned to his place, he was followed by a cobra, who wound himself around the speaker's platform.

COBRA (*hissing and spitting*). Banana trees or no banana trees, the time has come, say I, to think of taking our kings from another species.

LION. You are certainly entitled to your opinion; it is very helpful to get a number of constructive views.

NARRATOR. The visiting rabbit could hardly keep from dancing with pleasure and clapping his paws.

UNCLE. The beauty of it, oh the beauty of it! "A number of constructive views!" What a king, what a country!

NARRATOR. And now a bear stood up.

BEAR. I do not necessarily support Sir Scales; but I want to make it perfectly clear that unless you lions subsidize the culture of honey bees, I might subject his proposal to a sympathetic examination.

LION. I do trust that we can satisfy you; in the meantime I want to thank you for your important contribution to this debate.

UNCLE. He thanks him, he thanks him! But nephew, surely this is all a game! It can't be serious. They're all in a plot together, so to speak, and they're pulling our legs.

RABBIT. Pulling what? I'll show you, and when I've shown you, you can cross the river again and give your spineless friends a report about us.

NARRATOR. And leaving his uncle speechless, he leaped into the midst of the assembly. The uncle thought he was dreaming when he saw his own kinsman stride to the platform and heard him state with great dignity...

RABBIT. And I the rabbit am dissatisfied with the way you lions and elephants and bears trample all over our cabbages without any regard for our interests. I demand that you guarantee the integrity of our fundamental vegetables.

LION (*politely*). I believe your speech is out of order...

NARRATOR. Said the lion. The bear added...

BEAR. He certainly failed to follow parliamentary procedure.

NARRATOR. The serpent declared...

COBRA. The rules are clear: a *cuique suum* petition must be filed *ad usum* with the clerk.

ELEPHANT. And filed with the clerk before the opening of the session under subsection 16b.

LION. I am indeed sorry...

NARRATOR. Concluded the lion. And—

UNCLE. Wait!

NARRATOR. He gobbled up the white rabbit. The uncle wanted to shout...

UNCLE. They've eaten my nephew!

NARRATOR. But he looked around him at the little animals who were in the gallery with him. Nobody seemed to have noticed a thing. Then he looked at the Parliament: the lion, the bear, the cobra, the panther, the orangutan, the elephant, the rhinoceros—

UNCLE. Heavenly gods, they're huge! I think I'll go home.

NARRATOR. And he went back to his side of the river. He was used to keeping quiet. (*Pause*) As for me, rather than give you my opinion of the case, I'll sing you a few couplets as follows.

Rule the happy realm who will,
Master Jack or Mistress Jill,
Haughty captain, sober prelate,
Jeweled king or bearded senate—
Brother, mind this homely truth:

LION. VAIN IS THE BITE WITHOUT A TOOTH.

THE PERFIDIOUS SPIDER

Characters

Narrator
The Fly
The Spider
The Cousin

NARRATOR. Evil is what others do. What you and I do is always good, and what is more, we are ready to prove it. So it was with the spider who caught a fly in his web.

FLY. Yipes!

NARRATOR. As he was running toward his prey on all eight legs, the fly went on his knees (as far as the web allowed him) and cried...

FLY. Mercy! Mercy!

NARRATOR. But the spider was not to be moved.

SPIDER. Why should I let you go? The law of nature demands that I eat you; and on top of nature I'm hungry.

FLY. But I don't want to die!

SPIDER. Neither do I. I am eating you, my dear, in order to keep alive.

FLY. Of course, you have the right to live too. But if you'll let me go, I promise to send another fly your way. Your web hangs in a dark corner (God knows how I fell into it) but I'll send somebody on an errand straight into your clutches, word of honor, my own sister if necessary.

SPIDER. Well, I'd be a bit of a fool to free you on the basis of a promise. But I'm not heartless either. Call over one of your friends, tell him you've found a piece of meat in this corner, and the moment he is caught I'll release you.

NARRATOR. It was not the best bargain in the world—the fly would have preferred his own offer—but what could he do? So he sang as bravely as he could...

FLY. Dinner's on the table!

COUSIN. Where? Where?

NARRATOR. Called out a cousin of his, and flew straight into the web.

COUSIN. You son of a cockroach, why did you lure me into this trap with you?

FLY. In order to save my life. There never was a better reason. (*To the spider*) Well, sir, I've lived up to my part of the bargain. Unbind me at once.

SPIDER. Unbind you—a cowardly scoundrel who lures a neighbor to a cruel death in order to save his own skin? I couldn't ever look at myself in the mirror again!

NARRATOR. And in the name of decency he gobbled up both flies. (*Pause*) Evil is what others do. What you and I do is always right....

THE PONY WHO CAME TO A STREAM

Characters

Narrator

The Pony

The First Trout

The Second Trout

NARRATOR. A young pony who was traveling to enrich his life found himself at the edge of a rapid stream.

PONY. Looks like water, and looks like it's in a hurry. How do I hoof it across to the other side?

NARRATOR. After thinking it over for a few minutes, he cautiously dipped one foot in...

PONY. Cold!

NARRATOR. Then another, then his third, and then his fourth. Presently he was standing up to his nostrils in water.

PONY. What next, I wonder.

NARRATOR. Two good-natured trout came swimming down the current.

FIRST TROUT. Is anything the matter, my friend?..

NARRATOR. Asked one of the trout.

PONY. Nothing much, thank you for asking, and good morning to you both. I'm obliged to cross to the other bank in order to enrich my experiences of the world, but I'm afraid of drowning.

FIRST TROUT. Come now! It's a well-known fact that all mammals, with the exception of man, swim by instinct.

PONY. Swim by what?

FIRST TROUT. By instinct, or inborn disposition, or congenital ability. I thought everybody knew it.

PONY. Oh, of course...

NARRATOR. Said the pony, ashamed of his ignorance; and so encouraged, he lurched into the middle of the rapid. The current toppled him at once...

PONY. Help! Help!

NARRATOR. And carried him off.

PONY. Help! I'm drowning! (*Vanishes*).

FIRST TROUT. Hm. I really thought that all mammals can swim.

NARRATOR. The trout who had been silent so far spoke up.

SECOND TROUT. All mammals can swim in quiet waters. One should always speak in full sentences, my dear.

THE QUEEN AND THE POODLE

Characters

Narrator
The Queen
The Poodle
The Minister of Transportation
The Minister of Information
The Minister of Culture
The Minister of Foreign Relations
The Mutt
The Footman

NARRATOR. A poodle had strayed into the boudoir of the Queen of Patagonia. She was beautiful, her eyes shone like two pearls, and her skin was the color of early morning. The poodle was greatly impressed, for this was the first queen he'd ever met. But the queen too was delighted.

QUEEN. Come here, pretty pretty poodle; sit on my lap; how sweet! Here's a piece of sugar for you from my own silver dish, and wait! hold still, my darling, because I'm going to tie this blue ribbon around your neck.

NARRATOR. And she kissed his cold nose a dozen times. The poodle licked her hand in return as daintily as he could...

POODLE. Allow me...

NARRATOR. First scraping his tongue against his teeth in order to make it perfectly clean. After a while, the queen summoned her footman and ordered him to find the best cushions for the poodle in her apartments.

QUEEN. Be gentle with him!

NARRATOR. That same afternoon the queen was presiding over a meeting of the Patagonian cabinet.

QUEEN. A dreadful affair! Nothing but urgent business, crises, catastrophes.

NARRATOR. First came the Minister of Transportation...

MINISTER OF TRANSPORTATION. Our camels are wearing out, your majesty, I must have new camels immediately!

NARRATOR. Then the Minister of Information...

MINISTER OF INFORMATION. When in Christ's name will Patagonia adopt the telephone?

NARRATOR. Then the Minister of Culture...

MINISTER OF CULTURE. The peasants are using bad grammar in the fields again!

NARRATOR. And then the Minister of Foreign Relations...

MINISTER OF FOREIGN RELATIONS. Just as I feared! The Americans have never heard of Patagonia!

NARRATOR. Seven bundles of documents lay before the queen. She had to read them all, sign them...

QUEEN. And understand them too.

NARRATOR. Just at that moment the poodle ran into the Council Room—the footman had left the door ajar in order to listen—and blissfully wagging his tail, he jumped onto the queen's lap again and raised his muzzle to her face.

POODLE. Here I am again! Woof!

NARRATOR. He was still wearing his blue ribbon.

QUEEN (*shouting*). Who left the door open? Who let this mongrel in?

NARRATOR. The terrified footman came running.

FOOTMAN. Your majesty called?

QUEEN. Throw out this dog; is this a cabinet meeting or a zoo?

FOOTMAN. Yes, your majesty.
(*He throws the poodle out of the palace*)

POODLE (*wailing*). What happened? What did I do wrong?

MUTT. Excuse me for noticing your grief, but I'd like to help if I can—with good advice...

NARRATOR. Said a philosophical mutt who found the poodle wandering near the ditch where he lived. So the poodle told him the whole fearful story. The philosophical mutt listened carefully.

MUTT. Don't you know the saying of the wise men? That there is a time and a place for everything?

POODLE. But not for love!

MUTT. Even for love.

NARRATOR. A few days went by. The poodle could hardly eat. Now and then he chewed listlessly on a worn-out bone, because he

was really famished, but he paid attention only to his disappointed heart.

POODLE. I can't bear it. I must see her again. She does love me.

NARRATOR. So he ran back to the palace, and without hesitation, without a single wrong turn, he found his way once more to the queen's boudoir.

NARRATOR. The queen was reading a romance when she saw the poodle at the foot of her couch.

QUEEN. My pretty poodle is back! Come here, my poor darling, forgive me for being mean to you, it was such a dreadful day! And look! My ribbon is still tied around your neck, but ever so wilted, ever so besmudged, and I'm sure you haven't swallowed a morsel in days!

NARRATOR. The poodle was beside himself with joy and frisked in his queen's arms as happily as a lamb in clover. But when a footman arrived carrying a dish of delicacies for him, he remembered his hunger and fell to eating with loud, voracious gulps. It was the finest meat in the palace. Even the footman ogled it with envy. As for the queen, she was delighted to see her pet enjoying the dinner she had given him. But after a while she grew impatient.

QUEEN (*mirthfully*). That's enough! Now I want to play with you.

NARRATOR. And she bent down to take the poodle's dish away. Imprudent queen! A gobbet of meat was left in the dish. The poodle bit her hand and snatched up the meat. It was gone in a second.

QUEEN. My hand is bleeding!

FOOTMAN. Shall I destroy the hound, your majesty?

(The queen and the poodle look at each other)

QUEEN. No; please bandage the wound.

NARRATOR. After the footman had left, the queen took the poodle into her arms again. He licked her hand remorsefully.

POODLE. I'm nothing but a beast....

NARRATOR. But the queen gently stroked his head.

QUEEN. Never mind. I should have remembered that there's a time and a place for everything.

POODLE. Even for love....

NARRATOR. Thought the poodle.

THE RICH IBIS AND THE PAUPER THRUSH

Characters

Narrator
The Ibis
The Thrush
The Thrush's Wife

NARRATOR. The ibis and the thrush had been good friends in their student days, long ago. They had shared their meals...

IBIS. Here's a leg of spittlebug, old man.

THRUSH. And I brought two slices of cold frog.

NARRATOR. And they had warbled all night in praise of ladies they were too poor to entertain.

IBIS and THRUSH (*singing*).

Of all the birds that I hold dear,
Phyllis my robin hath no peer;
There is no bird so fair, so fine
Nor yet so fresh as this of mine.

NARRATOR. Today they were still friends—friends, of course, as one is friends when one is quite grown up, has married, brought children into the world, and learned to look at life maturely. The ibis had become extremely rich...

IBIS. By working hard.

NARRATOR. And the thrush had remained poor...

THRUSH. Also by working hard.

NARRATOR. The thrush lived with his family—

THRUSH. Tell them! In a messy mass of decayed wood and cowdung, that's where, next to a factory that makes stinking carburetors.

NARRATOR. The ibis, on the other hand, had just acquired a magnificent hideaway made of the finest Amazonian twigs.

IBIS. Let's not exaggerate....

NARRATOR. One of its two nests sheltered the young ones; it faced the mountains and overlooked a lovely ground of roses, azaleas, and camellias. The other, quite close to the first, yet snuggled in a

delicious rash of leaves which gave it privacy, housed the ibis couple and faced a lake—

IBIS. A pond, a simple pond!

NARRATOR. Over which the orange rays of the setting sun gently laid themselves to sleep.

IBIS. Cheap purple prose.

NARRATOR. The thrush and his wife never visited the ibis.

WIFE. You can imagine why.

NARRATOR. But the ibis liked his old friend.

IBIS (*to the Narrator*). I do. I'm the same, he's the same, so now and then I fly over for an informal visit. But it's becoming harder all the time. Every other topic of conversation seems to depress my old *camarade*—and I won't even mention the sour-faced wife. All that's left is reminiscing. (*To the Thrush*) Do you remember the day you dressed up as an owl?

THRUSH (*depressed*). Sure I do. We laughed and laughed.

IBIS. And the time I miaowed behind your back and you almost fainted?

THRUSH (*glum*). Oh yes. It was fun.

IBIS (*to himself*). What shall I do? What shall I do?

NARRATOR. The ibis didn't want to give up his dear friend. He thought and thought, and finally an ingenious idea occurred to him. On his next visit, after the greetings and a sip of stale apple juice, the ibis produced a deep sigh that couldn't be ignored.

WIFE (*distrustfully*). What's the matter with you tonight?

NARRATOR. How she hated those visits!

IBIS. The matter is that I sit here and envy both of you.

THRUSH. *Envy us?*

WIFE. *Envy us?*

IBIS. Indeed I do. Oh, you don't feed on imported snails, I know, and carburetors have their drawbacks, but you love one another, your children respect you, you lead your quiet unruffled lives, singing much better than any ibis ever will, and ever would, do you hear, even if he owned all the gold mines of Araby. No, my old friends, believe me, it is not possessions that make a bird happy, happiness is not purchased.

NARRATOR. The two thrushes began to look more cheerful than they had in months.

THRUSH. Is anything specific the matter?

IBIS. I shouldn't worry you with my troubles.

WIFE. Of course you should. We've been your friends long enough, I hope.

IBIS (*groaning*). What shall I say? Living with my wife has become intolerable.

THRUSH and WIFE. We had no idea—

NARRATOR. Both were becoming hugely interested.

IBIS. We spend entire evenings not exchanging a single word. She demands fur-lined nests, flights over the Pacific, lotions for her feathers, God knows what else, while all I want from life is a dish of worms every day and a good chat with friends like you. We haven't a thing in common. And the children— I haven't told this to anyone— but our girl has taken up with a stork who cackles in free verse and drinks. She intends to live with him on top of a chimney. As for the boy, he keeps saying he wishes he'd been born something with four legs and a set of teeth. I don't know how much longer I can bear it.

NARRATOR. This was all news to the thrushes. They were amazed. But they consoled their friend as best they could...

THRUSH. Things will get better.

WIFE. You must look at the bright side.

NARRATOR. And dolefully shook their heads.

THRUSH. You see...

NARRATOR. The thrush said to his wife after the ibis had left them...

THRUSH. Haven't I always told you? It takes the rich to be really wretched in this world. Come here and give us a peck.

WIFE. Poor ibis...

NARRATOR. She kissed her husband and they spent a happy evening together. Meantime the ibis had flown back in haste to his nest, where he embraced his wife, folded their young under his wings, and sat down with them for a late supper under the moon, in full view of the agreeable lake.

IBIS. A perfectly ordinary pond, I do assure you.

NARRATOR. When his wife asked him what he had done that day, he only said...

IBIS. I have done a good deed.

NARRATOR. But later that evening, over a rare nectar of chrysanthemum, he spoke again.

IBIS. The fable has it, my dears, that the rich are unhappy. It is a fable we the rich should cultivate. We must pay priests, philosophers, and novelists to spread it. For it cheers up the world a little, and buys us, what? the forgiveness we crave.

THE ROCK AND THE SEA

Characters

Narrator
The Rock
The Sea
The Seagull

ROCK. I stand with hard torso, high forehead, and headstrong pride...

NARRATOR. Said the rock to the sea.

SEA. And I am flexible and insinuating...

NARRATOR. Replied the sea to the rock.

ROCK. When you come leaping at me, I hold out my fist and split you into a hundred splinters.

SEA. When I leap at you, I deviously divide myself and erode you with a hundred fingers.

ROCK. I shake you off, poor fool, every time you advance.

SEA. I leave off, proud imbecile, only to attack again.

ROCK. You attack me with the chips of myself, because you are too weak to do your own mischief.

SEA. I use you against yourself instead of wasting my own substance.

ROCK. I have proved that I am better than you...

NARRATOR. Concluded the rock.

SEA. My superiority over you is established...

NARRATOR. Settled the sea. At that moment, a seagull landed on the rock.

ROCK. You heard us!

SEA. Yes, you heard us! Which one of us is right?

SEAGULL (*singing*). Everybody is always right; isn't that what words are for?

NARRATOR. And away he flew.

THE SPARROW AND THE EXECUTIVE

Characters

Narrator
The Sparrow
The Executive

NARRATOR. On a certain day in spring, an executive was checking into notes receivable relating principally to current refinancing of the Corporation's outstanding debentures, when a sparrow sat down on the sill of the open window.

SPARROW. Poor executive...

NARRATOR. Said the sparrow...

SPARROW. What are you doing?

EXECUTIVE. I am checking into notes receivable relating principally to current refinancing of the Corporation's outstanding debentures.

SPARROW. That's really too bad. I like your face, so I'm going to tip you off to a good thing.

EXECUTIVE. Namely?

SPARROW. Namely that the sun is shining, the park is full of pretty girls, the fountains are squirting in the wind like clowns, and you should be out playing hopscotch instead of tallying notes receivable.

EXECUTIVE (*to the audience*). Another lecture on the Crass Commercial Spirit of the Age. (*To the sparrow*) Look, I could buy you by the shipload.

SPARROW. Just try; you'll soon find out that poets can't be bought.

EXECUTIVE. Oh yeah? Hang on to that window-sill a minute, will you?

NARRATOR. And he summoned the office boy, whispered something into his ear, and gave him a ten-dollar bill. This done, he returned to his debentures.

EXECUTIVE. Relax...

NARRATOR. He told the sparrow. Presently the office boy returned, carrying the most beautiful white cake the sparrow had ever seen. It had whipped cream all over itself in hills and dales, fudge, half

peaches, walnuts and almonds, and a large message traced in a ribbon of chocolate.

SPARROW. Sparrows Welcome!

NARRATOR. Alas, that was more than our gutterslurp could bear.

SPARROW. Such a cake!

NARRATOR. He'd never swallowed anything better than a forsaken muffin. So he flew into the office, gobbled up a chunk of cake, and found himself in the executive's hand.

SPARROW. Where am I?

EXECUTIVE (*chuckling*). In a cage, with your mouth full of fudge.

NARRATOR. For in the meantime the office boy had produced an empty birdcage, into which the executive clapped the sparrow like a shot.

EXECUTIVE. I've bought you and what's more you'll like it. Here's the rest of the cake, my little friend.

NARRATOR. The prisoner drooped.

SPARROW. You were right. I see now that the likes of me are free spirits only because nobody will buy us. I'll eat your cakes, and I'll sing for you while you collude price structures with your competitors.

EXECUTIVE. Shake here.

NARRATOR. And every day he made the office boy put a new feast in the cage. Once it was a puff framboise. Another time...

EXECUTIVE. A mother's home-made factory-fresh apple pie...

SPARROW. And a meringue chantilly...

EXECUTIVE. And a nesselrode supreme...

NARRATOR. But strange to report, as day followed day...

SPARROW. I don't know, but the cakes don't taste so good anymore.

NARRATOR. He began to have strange dreams...

SPARROW. Of bread-crumbs on the pavement, and parks full of pretty girls...

NARRATOR. At last he lost his voice. If only he could have had his cakes in the park, or the park in his cage! But that was asking for too much luck. And finally he died.

SPARROW. Because even those who can be bought can die.

EXECUTIVE. I'm sorry for my poetic sparrow...

NARRATOR. Said the executive, holding the cold little body in his hand.

EXECUTIVE. How frail is art! But how solid, instead, are my notes receivable!

THE SPINSTER, THE CANARY, AND THE CAT

Characters

Narrator
The Spinster
The Cat

NARRATOR. A spinster was living quietly with her cat and her canary. One day she left the bird cage unlatched by mistake, and while she was busy in her kitchen boiling a chicken for dinner, the cat put his paw into the cage. But the canary was no fool, and the moment he saw a claw where a claw had never showed up before, he began to tweet like a maniac and to shake the cage by flying against its bars. The spinster came running in.

SPINSTER. You horrible thing!..

NARRATOR. She cried, pulling the cat away.

SPINSTER. You mean, horrible, cruel thing, you were going to murder an innocent little bird!

NARRATOR. And, though she was a lady, she gave her cat a memorable whack on his rump. That evening, as she was putting fork and knife into her meal, the cat sat himself down on a chair by the table and said...

CAT. What are you eating there, my mistress?

SPINSTER. Chicken.

CAT. Isn't chicken a bird?

SPINSTER. I suppose it is.

CAT. Why do I get beaten up for wanting to eat a bird and why don't you beat yourself up for eating another?

SPINSTER. That is not a nice question. You were going to murder the little bird practically in front of me. Dear Jesus, I would have seen the feathers in your jaw and the blood on the kitchen tiles. Whereas the chicken was scientifically processed a hundred miles from here, so that I saw nothing happen.

CAT. Why didn't you tell me before? Leave the cage open again, and I promise I'll eat the canary clean and quiet while you're away.

SPINSTER. You wicked animal...

NARRATOR. Said the spinster, biting into the chicken's thigh...

SPINSTER. You don't want to understand. The canary is a pet, the chicken is food.

CAT. Not for me; for me the canary is food too.

SPINSTER. Very well, but as I nourish you loyally and plentifully, and at no small expense to myself, there's no reason why you need a canary.

CAT. Yes there is.

SPINSTER. No there isn't.

CAT. Yes there is; canary is caviar for us cats, and that's more than I get loyally and plentifully around here.

SPINSTER. Enough! — (*she stands up and shakes a chicken leg at the cat*) That canary is mine, mine, mine, and you won't touch him!

NARRATOR. Mine, mine, mine! Cats and you and I know when we come to the unanswerable argument. The cat slunk off the chair and went to lap up his nuggets of tripe, and he never ogled the canary again.

THE SQUIRREL WHO WAS CAUGHT IN A WAR

Characters

Narrator
The Squirrel
The First General
The Second General
A Gibbon
A Buzzard

NARRATOR. Though much is better than little, little is better than nothing.

(Noise of warfare)

NARRATOR. The gibbons were making war on each other and raising a tumult in the forest. One day, as they were pelting each other with coconuts from adjoining trees, a missile struck a squirrel who was bringing the afternoon's harvest home to his family, and stretched him stiff and dead at the feet of his spouse.

SQUIRREL. My husband! The gibbons have killed him! They killed my provider! What will happen to our children?

NARRATOR. Sobbing all the way, she herded her young into a hollow of her tree and ran up to gibbon headquarters a dozen branches higher, jumping out of the way of the coconuts and pineapples that flew all about her. When she reached the gibbon general, she raised a pitiful clamor about her dead husband and her unprovided children, holding the fatal coconut in her paws.

SQUIRREL. That coconut was meant for one of you! We squirrels have nothing to do with your war, we don't even know what it's about.

NARRATOR. Here the general interrupted her.

FIRST GENERAL. It's about ideals, madam, and it might not be amiss if you learned something about the important issues of our world.

SQUIRREL. I don't care about ideals, my husband is dead of a mortal wound, my children are going to starve, and I demand

compensation, namely a winter's supply of cashew nuts and an escort out of this infernal tree.

FIRST GENERAL. You're out of your mind. I'd like to know how we could carry on a decent war if every time a bystander was hit we were obliged to dip into the treasury to compensate him. Get out of here, and next time tell your husband to duck. Besides, he was hit by the enemy and not by us, so take your complaint to the next tree.

NARRATOR. With this, the squirrel was booted off the branch, and the gibbons went back to their affairs. The squirrel stopped by the hollow to see that her children were safe, and then, taking advantage of a lull in the bombardment, she ran across to the tree where the enemy was lodged. She quickly made her way to the general of the hostile gibbons, and reported her complaint, exhibiting the coconut once more.

SQUIRREL. Look at the weapon, you can't deny that it's yours, it killed my innocent husband and left my children without provision. I demand that you make some restitution to us, namely a month's supply of cashew nuts.

SECOND GENERAL. Are you on our side in the fight?

NARRATOR. Asked the general.

SQUIRREL. What do you mean on your side? I'm a squirrel, a different species and a mother of three, I'm a neutral, I have no ideals, I don't belong to any side.

SECOND GENERAL. God strike you, we don't like neutrals around here. Get out of my tree before I have you clobbered to death as a spy.

NARRATOR. Terrified, the mother squirrel ran away as fast as she could. On the way down, a kindly old buzzard who had watched the scene took her aside and whispered into her ear...

BUZZARD. Go back to your children, madam, take them away while you can, and don't make trouble merely because you are right. You must always smile; smile at everybody, and keep saying thank you.

NARRATOR. With this, the widowed squirrel went back to the hollow, and began to move out her children and three or four berries she still had in a hutch. As she was hurrying down the trunk with her brood, an armed gibbon stopped her.

GIBBON. Where do you think you're going with all these supplies?

SQUIRREL (*smiling and curtsying*). To the authorities, in order to help the brave soldiers.

GIBBON. That's enough. Just hand those berries over to me, I'll take 'em to headquarters, let's see you out of here by the time I've swung my tail around this branch.

SQUIRREL. Thank you, sir...

NARRATOR. Said the widow, and she left the tree with the little squirrels, bereaved, battered and robbed, but alive.

(Noise of bombardment; the narrator and squirrel flee)

THE STUBBORN COBBLER

Characters

Narrator
The Cobbler
The Cobbler's Wife
Donald
Chorus

NARRATOR. A cobbler whose name was Barnaby lived with his wife Alice in a deep, narrow valley, in a country of which I know only that it was excessively damp. One unlucky day, when it happened to be raining ten times as hard as usual, this cobbler got horribly angry with his wife.

COBBLER (*hammering away at a shoe*). Twelve hours a day I fix lousy shoes to keep a roof over our heads, and what do I get? Cold soup and stringy meat.

NARRATOR. The alarm had sounded in the village, and the people were running toward high places.

CHORUS (*outside*).

Neighbor, oh neighbor, pack up and away,
Or surely you'll drown by dark of the day.

NARRATOR. And Alice was pleading with her husband...

WIFE. Dearest Barnaby, relent, for God's sake, and forgive me this one time for the cold soup and the stringy meat. The streets are flooding, our neighbors are running away, let go that shoe and—

COBBLER (*hammering at the shoe*). Silence, you bitch! I work my nails off to support you and when I'm hungry I can't even get an honest meal out of you!

WIFE. Forgive me, forgive me! You can't tell that I'm kneeling because the water has come up to my bosom, but I beg you to postpone your anger long enough to run away with me. Take the shoe along, it belongs to neighbor Donald, who has already escaped. You can beat me with it once we're safe.

NARRATOR. And still the other villagers were running for their lives.

CHORUS (*outside*).

Neighbor, oh neighbor, pack up and away,
Or surely you'll drown by dark of the day.

NARRATOR. But the cobbler thought of nothing but his anger.

COBBLER (*hammering away*). Damn, damn, damn!

NARRATOR. So Alice ran away by herself, and reached a high place where she met her neighbor Donald.

DONALD. Greetings, my sweet Alice! As you can see, I have only one shoe for my two feet.

WIFE (*tearful*). I apologize, but my husband is still working on your other shoe.

DONALD. Where is the dear man?

WIFE (*sobbing*). Steady at his work-bench, in spite of the flood.

DONALD. Do tell! Well then, come with me into this cave, pretty Alice. I've lit a fire, and we'll let it dry us together.

NARRATOR. When the waters subsided at last, the cobbler was found stubbornly drowned beside his work-bench.

DONALD. My shoe was ruined, but I married my sweet Alice instead.

NARRATOR. And many a time, as the years went by, they shook their heads together over the deceased Barnaby.

WIFE. Solid as a rock he was.

DONALD. And so fond of his soup and meat.

THE TERMITE AND THE ANT

Characters

Narrator
The Termite
The Ant

ANT. What are you doing in that hole?

NARRATOR. Asked a pretty ant of a burly termite as she was strolling on an old log.

TERMITE. I live here, my dear...

NARRATOR. Replied the termite.

ANT. How odd! Do you enjoy it down there? And what's it like?

TERMITE. I enjoy it very much, and it's like safe and peaceful and comfortable; my pantry is always full of delicacies; and I'm not mauled like you by nasty winds, ugly frosts, flaming suns, marauding enemies, and beastly men.

ANT. It does sound jolly. Did you say a full pantry?

TERMITE. I did indeed say a full pantry. Would you like to come and see?

ANT. Why not?

NARRATOR. And down she went into the hole. It was awfully black at first, and when she got used to it, it was still awfully black; but she could feel that she was in a gallery.

ANT. Where are you, friend termite?

TERMITE (*touching her nose*). Right here, my dear; follow me and make yourself at home. I don't get many visitors, you know.

NARRATOR. And they walked down the gallery. It was not too difficult, because the gallery was so narrow that you couldn't get lost in it, it led you onward all by itself. But the blackness was giving the ant terrible flashes, and she became anxious to arrive at a respectable room. After a dreadfully long time, she heard the termite say...

TERMITE. Well, here we are. This is my dining room. Feel the antique paneling and the sturdy furniture. Relax, my dear, and let me fix you a timber sandwich.

ANT. Where am I? Where am I? I'm going blind. It's as black here as in your hallway. I can't see a thing.

TERMITE (*surprised*). Why would you want to see things? What good would it do you down here? Seeing's all right where there's danger, but down here we don't need all these glares and shadows and visions. Enjoy yourself, my dear, sit down, here's a comfortable splinter.

NARRATOR. But the ant was terrified. She almost wept, and the flashes were getting worse.

ANT. I don't want to sit down! I want the light! Oh, where's the way out?

NARRATOR. And she ran around groping for the opening to the gallery, bumping here and bumping there, so that the termite was quite bewildered.

TERMITE. I'll help you, my dear. But why don't you like it here? Didn't God make the darkness for his creatures to enjoy?

ANT. It's not true! It's not true! God made the darkness to punish horrible animals like you. Where's the light? Oh where's the light?

NARRATOR. The termite was so dumbfounded by what the ant had said that for a while he forgot to move. But the ant was still crying with terror, so he finally caught her and guided her into the gallery.

TERMITE (*sadly*). Shall I see you out, my dear?

ANT. Let me go!

NARRATOR. And she ran and stumbled toward the blessed hole—ah there, after a twist in the gallery...

ANT. There it is at last!

NARRATOR. And she jumped out into the world, upon which a quiet moon was shining. Joyously she exclaimed, sitting on her hind legs as though she wanted to embrace it...

ANT. Heavenly moon! Sweet shapes of the world! Take me back!

NARRATOR. As for the termite, he remained behind to puzzle over the miserable novelty he had heard.

TERMITE. Did God make us his good termites to enjoy his darkness, or was she right, did he make the darkness to hate us with?

NARRATOR. He was still thinking about it as he ate his dinner, and the question ran after him even on his snug little plank, as he was falling asleep. But next morning, when the blackness seemed to be laid fresh and thick in every cranny, he rose from his sleep invigorated again.

TERMITE. To work!

NARRATOR. He cried, and, biting with relish into the log, he dug a deeper room for yet a darker, darker night.

THREE REVOLTING ANIMALS

Characters

Narrator
The Rat
The Skunk
The Porcupine
The Jackal
The Lion

NARRATOR. A rat, a skunk, and a porcupine were bemoaning their evil destiny.

SKUNK. I have lost my appetite for life...

NARRATOR. Said the skunk.

SKUNK. I am hated and shunned. My name is used for petty ridicule. Fame, honor and affection are forever denied me. Why, last week, when I waved a friendly tail at a little impertinent monkey, he put out his tongue and flung me an obscene grimace.

NARRATOR. The porcupine joined in.

PORCUPINE. And I? Though I lack your beauty, master skunk, I am an honest family man, a decent provider, in my ribcage beats a simple heart. And yet for every quill on my body the world has stung me with a barb of derision. Yesterday I gave a kindly greeting to a gazelle, who tittered in reply, 'A genteel porcupine! I've seen everything now!' and ran laughing into the woods.

RAT. Gentlemen...

NARRATOR. Said the rat in his turn...

RAT. They may laugh at you or avoid you, but they do not loathe you as they loathe me, the rat, whom they call plague, vicious killer, lover of sewage. My intellect and my agility only excite their horror. Last month I nodded at a rabbit—

SKUNK (*sarcastically*). Everybody loves a bunny!

RAT. I nodded at a rabbit, and he screamed 'A rat! A disgusting rat!' as only a rabbit can scream when he sets his mind to it.

NARRATOR. Putting their heads together, the three unhappy creatures decided to complain to the lion, who was king of the

animals. They arrived at court as the monarch was dining, and were greeted by a jackal, who was the king's majordomo.

JACKAL. You may watch his majesty at his repast, and present your petition after dessert. You are not among his favorites, but his majesty gives a hearing to even the lowest.

NARRATOR. The lion was sitting at table with an enormous bib under his beard.

LION (*roaring*). What's after soup, stoopid?

NARRATOR. The majordomo lifted several silver covers.

JACKAL. Your majesty, here is a homely but excellent rabbit stew, a superb *émincé de gazelle*, and *singe en brochette*, the chef's specialty.

LION. *Singe en brochette?* What's that?

JACKAL. Monkey on a spit.

LION. Hand it over!

NARRATOR. After the lion had finished eating, and as he was wiping the grease off his whiskers, the jackal told him...

JACKAL. Your majesty, here are three of your citizens, the skunk, the porcupine and the rat, who say they wish to file a claim.

LION. A claim? What kind of a claim? Step forward, don't dawdle, speak up and have done.

NARRATOR. The three animals had watched the lion's dinner with wide open eyes and mouths. The rat, who was indeed no fool, cried out...

RAT. A misunderstanding, your highness! Not a claim, your majesty, but acclaim, oh king, enthusiastic acclaim!

NARRATOR. And he led his friends in a round of applause for the king. This done, they bowed to the ground and left the supreme presence as hastily as their legs would move.

LION. Revolting beggars. I was glad to see them go before the cognac.

NARRATOR. Our three citizens ran and ran until they arrived in a far-away field.

PORCUPINE. Oh God, I feel faint when I think of that sweet gazelle, that droll monkey, and that cuddlesome bunny.

SKUNK (*whispering*). Turned into main courses.

RAT. Yes, but turned into main courses, my friends, because they were not repulsive enough.

NARRATOR. And from that time, not one of them ever complained of his fate again.

THE TIGER WHO BECAME HUMANE

Characters

Narrator
The Tiger
A Boy
A Hunter

NARRATOR. Once there was a tiger who decided to become humane against the advice of all his friends.

TIGER. I want to show the world that in spite of our sharp teeth, our ferocious growl, and the cruel traditions of our race, some few of us are not beyond redemption.

NARRATOR. “But what about our nature?” his friends objected.

TIGER. We must overcome it.

NARRATOR. And so this tiger gave up killing people and animals. Instead he ate bunches of forget-me-nots, he picked up bananas and mangos, and occasionally he even grazed like a cow. It was not much fun....

TIGER. Awful alfalfa.... But....

NARRATOR. But he made up for his discomfort by his moral satisfaction.

TIGER. I am truly nice.

NARRATOR. One day, alas, a crowd of hunters spotted him as he was licking at some mushrooms.

BOY. There’s the killer!..

NARRATOR. Whispered a boy, and one of the hunters raised his rifle. But the tiger looked up at that moment and cried out...

TIGER. Stop! I am the kindly tiger, the famous tiger who has become peaceful!

HUNTER. I’ll show you what a peaceful tiger is...

NARRATOR. Said one of the hunters, and he shot the good beast dead between the eyes.

TIGER (*opening an eye*). If only the world agreed to see us as we see ourselves....

THE TWO MICE

Characters

Narrator
The Country Mouse
The City Mouse

NARRATOR. The country mouse was spending a holiday with his cousin the city mouse. Though he didn't come exactly from the country, but from a decent, small town in Ohio where life burns slow, if steady. Now he was in Greenwich Village, where his cousin had taken up painting. Most of the day the cousin mashed cream cheese on pieces of cardboard, and the other Village mice thought he was doing pretty powerful work. The country mouse, however, had other interests.

COUNTRY MOUSE. Oh if I could only find a really nice girl to settle down with!

NARRATOR. So he didn't say much about the cream cheese on the cardboard. But he did tell his cousin that he was a little shocked by the pace of life about him.

COUNTRY MOUSE. Goodness gracious, cousin, the words you use, the notions you throw around, the magazines you read, the friends you run around with—they all make my fur stand up on my back. And the females—well, they're no different. You and them—you talk about funny things—weird situations—private doings—sometimes not even normal doings—and not only sometimes, but almost all the time.

CITY MOUSE. In short, you're getting a free education at my house like nothin' they taught you back in Ohio. I hope you're enjoying it.

COUNTRY MOUSE. Oh yes, thank you. But maybe I'm not enjoying it as much as I ought to feel that I should be enjoying it.

CITY MOUSE. You're nothin' but a limp lollipop, but stick around; I used to be a choir mouse too.

NARRATOR. One evening they were disarraying themselves for a trend-setting party where they had been promised electronic guitars,

communal sniffing of Tibetan floor wax, and the unmentionable poems of a rat on parole.

CITY MOUSE. Now listen; I'm taking you to this party because our mothers know each other. But for God's sake don't make me look like a fool by staring and fidgeting if a couple of mice go off into the bednook, or if a mouse is using the needle to get more *with* the music, you know, into the gut, where it's alive, or if some girl rodent shows her—you know what I mean. We live the free life, if a mouse wants to feel unconstrained, who the hell are we to butt in with middle-class prejudices, so for God's sake don't act like a forlorn cheesehole.

COUNTRY MOUSE. You mean—some girl mouse might—might—?

CITY MOUSE. That's the true innocence, mon cher.

COUNTRY MOUSE. I know, but wouldn't it be nicer to have a quiet type of party? A little talk, a little singing, lemonade, cookies, musical chairs maybe, because all this freedom, you see—

CITY MOUSE. Freedom ain't the kind of thing you turn off and on. When you're free, you've *got* to be free, or else the other mice put the hex on you.

COUNTRY MOUSE. You mean if I'm not free tonight—?

CITY MOUSE. If you're not free tonight like the rest of us, whether you like it or not, we'll be hooted and cackled at till I'll never dare show my whiskers out of this hole again.

COUNTRY MOUSE. Oh cousin, is that what freedom is? I see you are as much a slave as I, and if slave I am and slave must be, I'd rather be a slave where I feel at home.

NARRATOR. And instead of going to the party, he ran all the way to Ohio, where soon afterwards he married the daughter of a Presbyterian churchmouse, and begot, in the most conventional manner possible...

CITY MOUSE. Once a lollipop always a lollipop...

COUNTRY MOUSE. A happy litter of miceling, both boys and girls.

NARRATOR. And was he not right in his way? Freedom, he had found, is but the slavery we happen to enjoy.

AESOP'S APOLOGY

Characters

Narrator
Aesop
King Croesus

NARRATOR. One afternoon, as Aesop was playing a game of chess against himself on a terrace belonging to his master, King Croesus of Lydia, the latter, fresh from the hunt, sat down with the fabulist in order to tease him a little.

CROESUS. My dear Aesop, I'm afraid you're something of an idler.

AESOP. Why, my lord? Because I am refining my chess game instead of galloping after a boar?

CROESUS. Never mind galloping, friend Aesop. Instead, take a look at your fellow bards and philosophers. Our young Greek world is teeming with geniuses who ascend one breathless height of Mount Parnassus after the other, each man determined to reach closer to the divine sun than his rival. Look at the great Peisander...

AESOP (*sighing*). I am looking, my lord.

CROESUS. How he ravished us with the ten thousand lines of his *Cnossiad*! Five days in a row he held us spellbound.

AESOP. Five long, unforgettable days, my lord.

CROESUS. And what about Phrynichus, that master of the stasimon, whose *Phoenician Virgins* we saw on our stage last spring? Did he not make man, woman, slave and even myself weep a flood of tears?

AESOP. He did, my lord, and afterward all of you made so merry with him in your palace that the walls shook with your laughter.

CROESUS. Because he deserved it, Aesop. When did you ever write a trilogy?

AESOP. Alas, alas.

CROESUS. And last night, as we sat banqueting, none other than Anaximander was nourishing our spirits with the sixty-eighth chapter of his *Treatise on Wind*.

AESOP. He was, my lord, and praise God, we are to have the sixty-ninth tonight.

CROESUS. Those, my lazy friend, are the immortals. Those are the visionaries whose works our descendants will be reading and revering. While you—

AESOP. Spare me!

CROESUS. Whom I noticed at the lower end of my table manhandling a side of pork, you mope and dream between meals, play games, throw bread at the ducks in my pond, and whenever the fancy takes you, humor those ducks into some fable three hundred little words long; more, I do believe, would exhaust you. What do you say in your defense, you pigmy?

AESOP. In my defense? When you have crushed the breath out of my body?

CROESUS. Have I? You appear to be breathing normally.

AESOP. In that case, if your royal highness will allow me to vent a tiny parable—

CROESUS. With chattering foxes and contentious cows again?

AESOP. No, no, my lord, nothing low; everything properly human.

CROESUS. On that condition, parable away.

AESOP. Thank you, my lord. You and I, my lord, know that the grandest, vastest kingdoms, like Persia, like China, like Egypt, must be governed by extremely wise men. And they, being as wise as their nations are immense, deserve our humble admiration. However, the world has its little kingdoms too, like your own prosperous Lydia, or that modest island of Samos where I was nursed. Shall these be governed by nitwits, my lord, to correspond with their few acres? Or is it your opinion that small kingdoms should be abolished altogether? Shall we make a gift of Lydia to Emperor Cyrus?

CROESUS. Not likely, you rascal.

AESOP. Well then, mine, like yours, is a small principality. You would like to shame me into enlarging it. I, however, only wish to rule it well. Yet this is where I tremble. Have I, have I ruled it well?

CROESUS. Were I to deny it, I would be lying instead of teasing. Master Aesop, you have been a wise governor of your few acres.

AESOP. If this is your true opinion, my lord...

NARRATOR. And now the fabulist kissed his master's jeweled hand...

AESOP. Good luck, Cyrus, adieu, pharaohs. The monarch who governs my little realm is happy.

