

"Oly, please get me
some words, written
words."

"Ma, what are words?"

"Words say things.
And if they are
written, they keep on
talking."

"OK, Ma, I'll go to
the library. I'll
bring you a wheel-
barrow full."

Introductions

While I wait for “Oly to bring me more words, I do still have a few in my “cudalogue” because I want to explain to you that I have been asked to write a book by my esteemed but somewhat deluded new mistress who thinks I have talent. She even gave me a book on writing to review but I cannot even tell you what “talent” is until I get this dictionary, whatever that is. Then I will have to examine two words, talent and definition. Already I predict a problem: I predict exponential definition build ups occurring just because I do not know the meaning of words.

But back to my soliloquy. I am flattered by her request but do I *have* anything to say that might benefit the world? Hasn’t everything already been said or written by Plato, by Spencer, by Socrates, by Aristotle, by Voltaire . . . by . . . God? These authors had the advantage of virgin thought . . . and expression in centuries past. Now we must stumble about in recycled attempts to emulate posterity, turning the ever spiked wheel of human nature. Just as I thought of wheels, I heard some . . .

“Isadore,” Mary said sliding into my reverie, “I want to introduce you to Bob, a wonderful friend; he’s just arrived and *he* has a reputation.”

“For what?” I ask breathlessly.

“Notoriety,” smiled Bob, and he sidled up to me, cigarette in hand. “I heard Mary asked you to write a book and I would like to apply as your consultant. And listen to this: you are going to get wheelbarrows filled with words and you’ll be able to do footnotes . . .”

The fragrance of his cigarette wafted to my nostrils and I was filled with warmth. I reconsidered. Perhaps I *could* contribute something worthwhile: commercials for cigarettes? For goat’s milk? And that I also could do “footnotes” would be a fringe benefit. “Are the footnotes padded?” I ask. “Do I have a per diem?”

“You have both,” he said and handed me a cigarette.

As I smoked, I said to Bob: “I can, at least, dictate. I should mention my background and experiential credentials so my public, if I have one, can evaluate my qualifications to add to the world’s inexperience. I confess my *rèsumè* is limited but I assure you that I have not lived a typical goat’s life and maybe I do have more contributions to the world scene than I expect.”

“I can see that you would,” said Bob.

“What about you: do you contribute to the world?”

Bob laughed, “Oh, I had planned to make words say what words have never said before but . . . ah . . .

“Oh, Bob, maybe we are kindred spirits then, at least, if I can accumulate enough words to make them say something new. . . and I also like cigarettes.”

“That should qualify you, Isadore, for all sorts of professions. Tell me something about yourself.”

“I have many professions but my favorite is lecturing.”

“Lecturing? On what?”

“On goats. And I think one of the most important assets of a goat is its stomach, actually, its four stomachs. And then I lecture my son, but at his age right now, he knows more than I do.”

Bob laughed. “Don’t I know? But what about these ‘four stomachs’?” Bob raised his eyebrows.

Yes, my lecture on goats’ stomachs is one of the most practical aspects of my repertoire.”

“Go ahead, I would certainly like to meet your stomachs.” laughed Bob.

To assure him that I was equipped for academic pursuits I donned my professorial expression and gave my opening assault. I do this often if I need to impress anyone that we goats like to eat. And we do. I took a breath:

“One asset we goats have is our contemplative natures and our four stomachs where we digest facts and foods alike, both without discrimination. To establish my credentials, it would be best to explain these four stomachs are adept in analysis.

“Our first stomach, the rumen is the initial chamber where what we eat is fermented . . .”

“Isadore, excuse me,” interrupted Bob again – “did you say your stomach manufactured fermentation—why you could be my source of alcohol – of course, I’m not supposed to drink it but . . . “

“Bob,” thank you; it’s my *first* stomach, the rumen, that is my brewery, and also my furnace—and helps me to stay warm in winter—I don’t know if I have enough barrels though to offer you a still. I’ll bring the issue up in my next cud session and that is most of the time.”

“Thank you,” said Bob. “I can see that you have immense verbal skills” and he lighted another cigarette.

“Then I also have my second stomach, my reticulum—for small items—and hardware.”

“Hardware? Do you mean you eat mechanical things like cars? Or computer chips?”

“No, nothing that big or technical—and they don’t taste good anyway. And by the time it reaches my reticulum, it’s almost too late. Because then I get de-liquified in my third stomach, my omasum. And there I get my energy. And finally, it goes to the abomasum for final review and digestion. That is the political analysis section. I have a cathedral stomach,” I said proudly.

“Oh,” said Bob, deflated. “It sounds complicated; I’d better stay with my own system: hard liquor. But how did you get here?”

“It’s a long story, Bob. My son, ‘Oly, christened because he was born in Ballard, the Scandinavian enclave of Seattle is more properly known as ‘Olyphant. He and I were most recently there residing under a house.

“Our owner was Allan, most wondrous except the Seattle codes did not agree; they were not in alignment with his. Again, I cannot explain what the word codes means except it seems to have negative connotations, the latter, with which I am exposed to often. I also understand ‘people,’ those institutions to which we are indebted for existence. Humans are capricious beings, in fact, much like we goats are.” I flung a thistle away from my nose that was teasing me.

“You see, Bob, I continued, Allan had rescued us only to find himself desperate. He lived in the city. Hiding us was no longer possible. The gas chambers were. . . ‘Ach,’ I thought. That’s when he called the Woodland Park Zoo. I heard him: ‘I am calling to inquire whether the zoo might not like two goats—they are Sa’anens (Swiss). The city will no longer let them live under my house and I have run out of adoption options’.”

“The receptionist stalled politely: ‘I don’t know if the zoo needs any goats.’ And then there was a long pause. ‘But I will ask . . .’ and then an even longer pause . . . if it does not . . . , I could take them to my property on San Juan Island. I’ve always had a goat in my imagination’.”

“Bob, did I pray. Would this receptionist like a goat in reality as well as in her imagination? Two goats?

“‘When may I call back’?” Allan asked.

“‘Tomorrow’.”

“Unfortunately, the zoo did not need any more goats; it would have been certain security for us and I define ‘security’ as food But four days later, Allan, I, the receptionist, now my new friend, Mary and ‘Oly were in the rear of a bucking, careening truck with oatmeal cookies as our panacea escaping to one of 400 islands (depending on the mood of the tide) in the San Juan Archipelago. On the ferry boat, I was both scared and breathless with this new phase of my life. The tide cooperated and we disembarked at

Friday Harbor to be presented with brochures on its charms. But more on this in another chapter.”

“Chapter,” laughed Bob. “Where have you learned so much already?”

“Oh, Mary gave me pages and pages of bureaucratic procedures and policies to chew on along with oatmeal cookies from her landlady as we drove up. They got pasted into *my* system. My abomasums has an entire new cabinets of files!

“Isadore, paper reigns supreme in this era, even though we are supposed to be wireless.”

“Does this mean that our menu will always be paper?” I asked in alarm—not that I wouldn’t profit. I would imbibe all those syllables but there would be no taste, no seasoning.

“No, you may eat ice cream if you want it. But Mary told me she has already purchased things for you, even hay in preparation for your arrival. She told me that ‘my goats will eat Ernie Gann’s hay *consistently* and write stories’.”*

“Oops,” I cried, I heard “tent.”

“What is wrong with tent?” asked Bob.

“Much is wrong. You see, goats have been professionals for centuries and one of our careers was to provide skins for tents, skins for clothes, skins for parchment, *consistently*. We were even used as tablets on which the Dead Sea Scrolls were incised. But all of these have ugly connotations for us.”

“I can understand that. We’ll issue an exemption for you and ‘Oly: no skins will be used for your book. We’ll discuss it at your next tutoring session,” said Bob. “That is, if you even need a tutoring session. Just ignore it for now.” “Ignoring things” was one of Bob’s chief charms with which he was eminently qualified.

“Bob,” I exclaimed, “You can see I have written several pages of my book already, but I feel I have little to contribute to the world”

“Oh, Isadore, you have much to contribute: “‘in the beginning was the word’.”

“Of course, and after that was the ‘spin’.” I said.

* My *first* footnote: Ernie K. Gann, 1910-1991, author of twenty-one books, one most notable, *The High and the Mighty*, in film, featuring John Wayne accruing several nominations for Academy Awards. Captain Gann’s later writings originated from his renovated chicken coop on San Juan Island. Alas, our chicken coop would not be large enough but we stored vocabulary there.

Bob laughed. “That is right; you’ve already started with your encounters with the civic authorities. The sign on Allan’s house that said “City Violation. The city (all cities) have so much experience with words; you could copy pages of them for the public’s benefit. And you’ve already dined on them. And if that’s not enough, add the counties, states and {*sotto voce*} the government. Later we could elaborate on ‘government’ in general.”

“But, Bob, in Seattle, I bleated back to those authorities and was going to end up in ‘the . . . the chambers’.”

“But that’s where Mary works—for the City—but don’t you see that the same entity that evicted you took you back, just at a different location. And here everything is location, location, location. In short, you have arrived at the location of locations.”

“I think I need a cigarette.”

“That you may have. I recommend them for worms . . . or for relocation.”

“But *you* must have a lot of worms; *you* smoke so much. Don’t you know that smoking is a hazard to your health?”

“I do know – but worms are also a hazard to *your* health. But, Isadore, let’s return to the subject at hand, I mean at your feet--your book.

Have you put in a dedication page? Have you explained what you want to convey?”

“What is a dedication page?

“You give to a relative, a friend or friends the honor of being the person or animal most valued in your project.”

“But that would be you. May I put it in now? “

“Of course, I would love to see it in advance. After all, I don’t know how long cigarettes and liquor will let me live.”

“Is it that bad?

“It’s pretty bad.”

“When I look back at when I came here, I realize I was really crazy—out of it. They told me when they let me go, under protest, from the VA Hospital, that I had too much brain and nerve damage to make it. They wanted to keep me at least a year, maybe more. But I would’ve been completely insane if I’d stayed there. I belonged in a drug-alcohol recovery facility—not a nuthouse. So I sprung myself. I’m glad I did. But it was three years of hell getting well.

But now I think I am well.” The only problem is that I brought on myself. Unless I could blame it on the protein enzyme I lack. Well, that’s still another subject. Ask Alcoholic Anonymous. Isadore, may I peek at the dedication?

“Of course, you may even autograph it.”

*Dedicated
To
Robert Hayes-Thompson*

*The Man
of
Extinction*

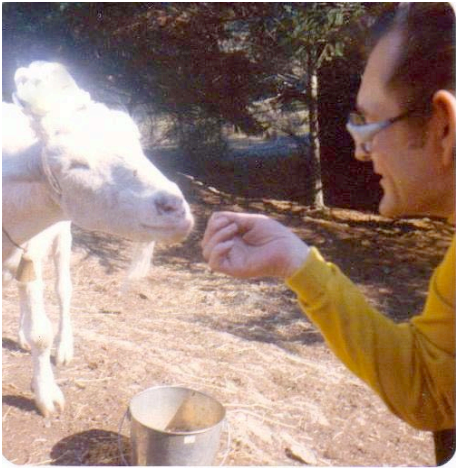


Who says:

I will make words say
what
words have never said before!

Bob laughed: “What a tribute, Isadore. I haven’t even started saying those words on paper. Maybe you will—on wireless. And I and Mary will help you. Shall we have another cigarette on that?”

“Absolutely,” I said.



As we smoked in the quiet stillness, I interrupted: “Bob, what *do* I want to convey? My cud is chewing on overtime already. It seems with these four stomachs to ponder with I could produce something. Just in my second stomach I’m already thinking about the enormity of the project. In one of the pages Mary gave me, I read that a book must contain directional purpose. How can one have direction when thinking about where the next meal is coming and if it comes what the critics will say.”

“But,” said Bob, I can almost assure you that you and ‘Oly will dine well and if you do not continue with the book, the critical index would be forever unfulfilled—negative potential unrealized, thwarted, Isadore, and even worse, the critics unemployed. Already they will say you’re going to be spoiled.”

I was perplexed. I didn’t want to thwart creativity or increase unemployment (unless it is my own). I guess a book has more potential than I first realized, I reflected. It would bolster the human ego, give opportunities to compensate for the usual humanistic vacuum. And I envisioned my publicity agents fabricating the embroidered phraseology so desired for front page quotes:

“Udderly delightful.” New York

“Divine.” Gott

“Censored.” *Rabbits Foot Journal*

“Rot.” *Waste Management*

“Isadore, what did you last eat to get so many words?”

“It was the cookies I ate on the truck. They were a gift from Mary’s landlady. But Mary told me I would now have a professional diet, hay. And I can see one purpose for myself in writing a book.”

“What?” asked Bob.

“To find a purpose . . . Just *that* would be a purpose, to have direction.”

“Isadore, you are even more intangible than I am.”

“But, Bob, then if you would rather have me be practical, I could study the advantages in liabilities.”

“Huh? Well, yes, that would be practical. Can you give me an example?”

“Maybe. One thing I have learned, especially during my sojourn in the city is that liabilities sustain industry. And so even ‘Oly, my son, has an important purpose in life. He can supply many liabilities and therefore sustain much industry. For instance, he has such a turbulent personality, he may require a psychologist and therefore the psychologist will have continued *purpose* in his life as well as being remunerated. Then there are the subsidiary benefits to the tangential aspects like the staff, the evaluators and medical arenas.”

“Izzy, now you are into motivational issues *and* business. How about another cigarette instead?

While smoking pleurably, I thought of my new “digs.” How I missed Allan and yet here were new humans in my life, one with cigarettes and the other, my mistress who “worked at the zoo.” And I was now in her budget thanks to Allan—and the zoo. ‘Work’ was a word I learned very quickly. Its definition was a person who leaves home to earn money to support those who don’t leave home. It meant I could have this home. Of course, I intended to reciprocate by “landscaping” the grounds and, by example, train ‘Oly. And where *is* he, my assistant? My best liability? And now according to my own philosophy, my best asset?

While I cogitated, and Bob smoked, Bob said: “Isadore, I need to tell you a few other things.”

“What?” I asked dismayed. “Have I violated more codes?” Codes seemed to be a big part of my life, especially with this new collision of urban and rural cultural patterns.

“No”, laughed Bob. “I just want you to know there are a few formalities required in order to write a book.”

“More?”

For one thing, you are already on Page 10 and there has been no Table of Contents.”

“Table of Contents . . . “I murmured. “I would agree to that—if I could select the supplies.” (I didn’t want to use that word “contents; the plural form of *tents* was unthinkable.)

“Of course, Isadore, it merely means you tell the public in advance what subjects are in your book,” sighed Bob as he took another whiff of smoke. I’ll design a chapter heading for you.

“But how can I know when the book isn’t even written yet? I will be happy to put all those things in *after* I finish writing it. It can go in at the end, the very last page. What other things to I have to know about?”

“Oh, things like getting an agent, and a publisher.”

“Ah, I already know what a “pub” is – that is where money drains out and liquor in. I don’t want one of those.”

“Well, let’s ease off and discuss these things later. In fact, ah, maybe, I think I better head out to the pub myself. Izzy, please don’t tell AA.”

“Oh, I won’t, alas, but thank you for visiting me. If you see ‘Oly, please tell him to hurry. And I couldn’t find ink in any of my stomachs. It blackens so many sins.”

“I’ll get them for you from the first octopus I see, Iz. We have marine biology labs on the island and the octopi socialize near there. ‘Bye. It’s been a great pleasure to meet you.”

When Bob left, I stretched out to design some thoughts I might tell the world. And I needed to get acquainted with as many of these things called words as possible so they would do what words were supposed to do. And where was ‘Oly with the dictionary to introduce me to them? And the big issue: how can I get more of these wonderful oatmeal cookies that make me say so many things?



I stretched out too far in this remarkable greenery—and fell asleep myself, only to struggle awake when a heavy sound preceded the arrival of – what – yes, a van. A van—the very kind of vehicle Allan drove. But he was not in it. ‘Oly was in it and . . . the coveted dictionary, almost as big as ‘Oly.

“Hey, ma, look what I’ve brought: the dictionary. And I met Bob on the way and he wanted me to give you a message. He said he was *not* going somewhere—that he was going to the library instead. He said he would pick up some verbs . . . and nouns . . . and really neat adjectives. He said he was also going to pick up some things that dangled, participles, I think.”

“Wonderful, but I don’t want things to dangle—I need things in their right places—like in my mouth.”

“I don’t think one can eat these ‘dangles.’”

“Oh, yes, I heard once that Jeremiah ate them. God said to him. ‘I have put words in thy mouth.’” I picked up the heavy dictionary and opened it to thousands of little crooked twigs. Except none had leaves on them. How would I ever be able to separate them into piles of sense?

“Ma, who is this Jerry? Oh, look. Bob is coming back in his car.”

“Iz, I’ve brought more stuff: lots of ink and some things to soak it up-- similes, metaphors, and even punctuation! Like this exclamation point! And I’ve ordered a few

more critics, just in case, I am not critical enough . . . and look at this bag. Did you know that words are colored—you can mix them up?”

‘Oly pounced on the bag first and opened it with his horns. “Ugh, colors.” He grimaced. Then he grinned. “I want my horns colored purple.”

I took a stick and swirled some of the painted words around.

“Think of gems,” Bob said.	Amethysts for evening water
	Emeralds for moss
	Rubies – sunsets
	Sapphires – for the night
	Diamonds – dew drops immersed in a rainbow

“Think of your own eyes:	Yours are a forest of reflected
	tourmalines, Izzy, gray with bits of
	carnelian and peridots.”

“Oh, beautiful,” I chortled seeing them seeping into each other in wavelets.

“Words can even make humans see a tree or see green moss shimmering in iridescent dew drops even if the things are not there,” continued Bob. “With words you can put a deer in the woods who is scrutinizing you from behind a tree. You can start a car and it will go wherever you say. You can take a trip around the world without even moving. And these are just some of the things words do.”

I was astounded. I picked up one word: “transparent.” It was clear and reflected the luminescent green moss. Then I looked closer and could see events in Washington, D.C. mirrored, aspirations of government, and lobbyists lobbying outside of the lobby. “Cool,” I said. I picked up other colored words and squeezed them together into an impressionistic pallet, orchid ribbons echoing through the amethyst evening waters.

“But what if I can’t find the right word? What if there are words with a forked tongue? Even if I have this wonderful book of twigs, this dictionary?”

Then you say, “Words cannot express . . .” “said Bob,” or ‘that word is on the tip of my tongue,’ and then hold out your tongue for your agent to pick it off . . . or cut it out.”

“And you will need to develop a style,” he said: “austere—that’s the one I prefer, gothic (that soars) or even baroque (ornate). Or another idea: how about early casual?”

“Izzy, you see “what the world needs is a rebirth of Greek thought. We need to rediscover the same. That is what sparked the Renaissance—and that alone. Nothing less is going to bring fresh intellectual air through the be-smogged windows of our civilization but a return to the Greek ability to fuse spiritual and material, ideal and real, theoretical and practical toward the aim of excellence.”

“But, Bob, I am a novice.”

“And, of course, I am trying to persuade you into my style; I realize, yet:

“The more flesh one can cut from a phrase, the better piece of writing it turns out to be . . . “

“Bob, whose flesh are you cutting?”

“Oops, I didn’t mean *your* flesh; I meant the substance, the fat of verbiage – here I go again, but . . . “

“Bob, whose ‘fat’?”

Bob laughed: “Izzy, the fat of the liberal school, not yours. The liberal school specter in the form of non-readers, of non-writers and of non-thinkers, has come home to roost. The problem with so many people today is not their political, social or economic thinking; it is their thinking, period. They use words like people use clothes and jewelry--as adornment for non-thoughts, and not as carriers for well-considered, logically thought-out ideas. This sickening stuff is the communicable babble that lets people say things like ‘I’m beginning to start on an approach toward maximizing my end-goal.’”

“But, Bob, thank you. Was that an example of the forked tongue? But didn’t you say there was a Gothic style? I think I will choose that.”

“How did you decide so fast?”

“That’s easy: gothic—it has ‘go{a}t’ right inside . . . of course, the originator didn’t know how to spell it, that’s all. But another reason I think I could be more ‘adorned’ is that when the ancient scribes wrote, much more effort was required to carve into soft, warm rock or clay not just peck a computer key. They didn’t want to add any extra words; they just wanted to get them hacked out. So they seemed austere. Actually minimizing their end goal.”

“That’s probably very true, Izzy. And I’m not against embellishment; it’s that the Greeks just stated their case. If a poet wanted to say the Aegean Sea was blue and purple in the deepening twilight, he just said it. No comparisons like: the Aegean was blue as a desert sapphire, shot with purple as of royal tapestry, in a twilight fading like a careful thief into a night of stygian deep. And I happen, for some reason, to like, and find as much drama in the sparser statement.”

“Bob, I will have to send all these opinions into my second, maybe even third stomach to digest. But I’m afraid I like some flowers in my austere desert so I could eat them along the way.”

My God, you already know these nuances”?

“Well, no, but I do know about evasion techniques.”

“That I’m also good at,” laughed Bob.

I was flummoxed. And elated. I didn’t know that last word; it just appeared on the tip of my tongue. An ox was going to help me, too. I kissed Bob goodnight with a lick and ‘Oly, serene, basking in the rare state of good behavior checked to see if his purple horns had become royal but told me he decided to delay a coronation. Let him be deluded as long as possible, I thought.

It was time to retire. Bob had left for his *en suite* lodging in Friday Harbor. (I didn’t know Bob was adding French to my curriculum but I see it might be a convenience when camouflage is needed—it gives élan, especially since my ancestors came from the French canton of Switzerland.)

I hoped I was too tired to try to run away. My mistress had thoughtfully held on to my chain (I could tell she was worried that I might abscond). Now she tied me to a post under the house. I did not mind: I am now good at sleeping under houses and I was close to a bundle of hay. ‘Oly joined us. And Mary stayed nearby. She is trying to be hospitable, I thought. But I wanted to cry because Allan was really gone. On the other hand, I had eaten several cookies by that same hand. After the second night, the chain was gone. But I was not.



To celebrate my continued existence, Mary took us to the top of the neighboring hill the following morning. “This doesn’t really belong to us,” Izzy, she said, “but I want you to see the view. You will get to see Canada.”

“Oh,” I bleated ecstatically when we arrived, “here are the gems Bob talked about: zircons, aquamarines and amber! And insects to go with it. And I think I see Victoria.

“That’s where the architecture is designed using gingerbread,” said Mary.

“Gingerbread? ‘Oly could eat it and give the design austerity.”



The Goatel

I came down from the view to resume acquaintance with my first hay bale which had arrived. Hay always makes me ruminative. It took me quite awhile to locate that word—I ran over several choices but they didn't have enough meditative flavor. But it was already in my second stomach. I realized I knew more than I thought last night. Bob's lectures still rumbled in my fourth stomach. I will try to be sparse, I thought. No, I won't; I'll be myself and plant a few flowers in between the clay and rock. And find more gems. And I look so thin. And I have knobby knees. But the hay should make me fat again.

I ruminated over what I might say for a page in my book, if, indeed, it did materialize. If it does, I want you to know something complimentary about goats because often it is the cow and sheep who receive the most attention. What do I know so far about us?

Our official name is *Capra* (meaning head in Latin—I hope that is managerial head and not mine). By a rather reluctant formula—reluctant because it requires skillful manipulation to persuade the formula to do the balancing act in *our* favor, the goat is a more efficient conveyor than the cow in turning pasture into milk. It does require a deluxe cuisine and appropriate per diem. 'No scientific rationing for goats has ever been practiced. But Morrison (in *Feeds and Feeding*) allows us 3-1/2 pounds of dry matter; Hansson is less generous; he permits (in *Hansson Animal Feeding*) only 2 pounds/dry matter. American goats are the most gluttonous, allowed 8 pounds per 1000. Then I have the additional problem: 'Oly, my son, eats everyone else's portion.

My formula is brief: I consider only the qualitative, not quantitative difference. I will not discuss our edible properties or our marketing attributes as you heard yesterday evening. I personally prefer a decorative rather than useful statement. That would then though bring us into the fashion world of adornment, clothes, and these also using our skins. But I am wistful enough to wish I could exist just because of my inherent charm.

And the fact that I am mentioning the practical talents we have does not certify that I or we agree with the applications. We have, in the historical sense, been forced to be generous, not always; in fact, rarely with our consent. And although it is true that our acquisitive appetites prevent reforestation, it is also true that our landscaping abilities are *nonpareil*. (I just looked up that last phrase; more French for my word supply. Of course, Bob would like us to have a superlative education, like he had.)

But sociologically, we are identified with the opposite, the poor; our socio-economic status is driven by them and I wouldn't want to disturb statistics already formed in neat

tables on paper. Or prevent them from having our milk. Maybe even with more milk, they could become more educated, even in French. And in nuances—once I find out what they really are.

I studied our new house. My mistress saw my interest and said to me: “The word ‘house’ is ambiguous. Sometimes I call it my mansion but also I call it ‘my glass hut.’ Its nickname is perhaps too pretentious – the Parthenon. I learned then quickly that Latin and Greek were also to be part of my education.

I also learned my mistress had a facility for original and innovative rationalizations, like our stable. I found much later in our island existence that just before our arrival she had gone to the library and taken out a book on goats. This book said having a stable for us was a requirement. And there was no stable shown on her blueprint mostly because there was not enough room on the napkin. And imagination (in which we existed earlier) did not require shelter. The “mansion” sucked out all available funding which seemed to come from a rather obscure source, a card with little bumps on it pushed into a slot. I tried to eat one but found it quite indigestible; it didn’t even make it beyond my teeth. Even my reticulum said “no admission.” Nevertheless, that piece of plastic produced a product called money. To align our posh primitive style with reality, she rationalized, we live as 16th century goats for they did not live in conventional stables; they ordinarily lived in covered lodging below or beside their respective owners’ houses, if not under the stars. This, she said, in our next chat session, she learned as an inspiration from her Bavarian heritage.

Our “covered housing” was to be under the house, although she assured us, the moon was available as a canopy also. I was amazed at how convenient coincidences are. After all my training at Allan’s, I was now “experienced” in being under a house and was immediately promoted to a position of prominence in my own establishment. The entrance was about four feet high (goat shoulder high), had its own kitchen, a respectable trough, two bedrooms (more, if needed), house pillars and an entrance and exit. I immediately dubbed it my “goatel.” And I must be certain I made a note of that word “rationalizations.” It is a most necessary addition to the local vocabulary.

As soon as the name of our establishment was official, my mistress called me in for a “conference.” It is part of the business continuity, she said. It is essential because one



must learn how to sit around a table (my interest was immediately perked) without falling asleep, drink coffee sparingly and nod at appropriate intervals. I was good at “nodding” although it often meant I was about to fall asleep but I “nodded” and said I would attend.

But I didn’t expect the news. She was to return to Seattle, to the very city that had put “Code Violation” on Allan’s house. She explained, as Bob had, that there were many parts to this institution and not all were violators; in fact, at the zoo, she was not put in a cell—well, actually, she was

but it had a door, and even, at stated intervals, she received a check—that meant she could put money in the bank in order to take it out again. She would be visiting *us* every week end. Meanwhile, Carol, also a single mother with one kid (just like me, I thought) lived nearby and would visit us daily. Bob would continue his tutoring. I was relieved. I was not to be deserted.



And Mary said we had ten acres of our very own. Had I known this right away I would have informed my mistress that we were “goats without borders” and ten acres might not be sufficient for our explorations. I felt while I was being educated, I had been deficient in not having supplied my new mistress with enough material to get acquainted with us but she was to learn our philosophy soon. Maybe Morrison and Hansson could help. I knew ‘Oly would be her star tutor.

That evening I and ‘Oly had meandered through the woods to the pond, our neighbor’s pond, I confess, to see what images lay there. The pond was silent and dark. I picked into my dictionary with my toe and there in a gray huddle lay the word “nebulous.” I flipped it over with my nose and it was still shapeless emitting faint thumps

of retaliation at being disturbed.

It was certainly the most suitable word for the day for the direction of my book for I was in a quandary: should I be like the sundial and “mark only the hours that shine,” or should I also write the words of the storms-- their dramatic pens that scattered lightning on the tablet of the sky? Those storms were waiting for their marching orders; they were planning to assault us at their convenience. Did our world have, well, a nebulous future?

When Bob returned the next day and saw I had two new chapters, he was enchanted. “How fast you learn, Isadore,” he said. “Tell me about what you’ve done since Mary left.”

“Well,” I said “in our first two days, we soloed and scrounged around experimenting with the area produce which, I must say, is abundant: blackberries, elderberries, grasses, wild roses—lush! The local leaves seemed approved by the goat nutrition experts. There is only one drawback: no water. And *we* have been very resourceful. I remembered we drove by a pond just before we came here but we also squeezed our omasums for a few drops.” And then I noticed that Bob was squirming uneasily.

“Isadore, “I have brought in water; it’s in my car. I’m to be your water boy.”

“Oh,” I exclaimed. “That is wonderful but I was just going to tell you that ‘Oly and I found that pond yesterday and we could get our water there, be self sufficient. It’s not far and we can easily tramp down there.”

“Uh, huh.” He squirmed again. “But Iz, that property with the pond is not in your ten acre grazing latitude.”

“But, Bob, I must tell you that goats don’t have borders.”

“Neither do I,” he laughed. “Shall we have a smoke?”

“Ah,” I said obligingly and after a whiff from his cigarette and some slurps from the water bucket, was totally *content*. Oops, there is that word “tent” smuggled in another word, again, I thought.

“Isadore,” said Bob between puffs. “How did you get your name?”

“Oh, my name. I like it. It seems to mean several things. I’ve been looking into this dictionary. And, Bob, it’s from the Greek and Hebrew and maybe even Arabic. If it’s spelled ‘Isi, it means, ‘gift of Isis’; if spelled ‘Isa’ it can mean an introduction or it can mean gift of God or in Arabic, gift of Jesus. And if I borrow the first letter ‘a’ and add it into the ‘dore’ part, I can make it ‘adore,’ in French or Latin. Or it could even be translated as ‘gold if I use the Venetian sense’. I’m not being austere enough, am I?”

“Isadore,” cried Bob. You are a phenomenon. I must take you on a shopping tour –to get even more education. What would like to learn more about?”

“I think I would like to learn more about the concept of God.”

“A divine choice,” smiled Bob.



My First Shopping Tour

We drove to a campsite on a hill. There tumbled in confusion were a series of boxes with brochures and souvenirs for many available gods. The Hindu gods were in profusion, each one trying to get to the top.

“But, Bob,” I said, “I wanted to see *the* god. One I could love.”

“May I help you?” said a clerk in stiff attire.

“Oh, I was hoping one of the gods here might be *the* . . . “

“Oh,” said the clerk, you’re shopping for . . . “

“I’m really just grazing . . . I really need preliminary information.”

“Look over here,” and he walked to cubicles in which sat various gods. “See, here is a famous one, Buddha,” and he held him up. “Of course, one problem is that Buddha himself said he was *not* a god – but he borrowed a few for decor. As you know, the Greeks, the Romans and the Hindus had many left over.”

Seeing my expression falter, he held up another one: “Now, this is Ishtar, the favorite goddess of Assyria and Babylon, the goddess of love and fertility . . . or maybe I should recommend ‘Isis,’ of Egypt or the *Qur’on* that took them away,” but then he looked more closely at me. “You are a venerable matriarch – but from what culture?”

“Oh, you’ve chosen one of the goddesses of *my* name, Isadore, and thank you, but does the god I might select depend on my cultural orientation?” I was momentarily thankful that I had brought my overnight bag (my third stomach still digesting dinner from the night before); there were several appropriate words still left . . .

“Generally, yes,” smiled the clerk. “You can see that most of these gods originated in certain localities and sometimes even in nature, for instance, Venus and Mars. Some astronomers believe those planets and even Earth have not been in our solar system that long. Therefore, they are anomalies and attract more attention. And an infinite number of Greek gods such as Zeus, Aphrodite and Athena exist. Did you ever notice that Athena and Eve had their birth procedure in a similar fashion? Athena sprang fully clothed from her father, Zeus; Eve directly from Adam? But here is their brochure.”

“Oh,” I said quite impressed. But is there anything more”?

“More than that? Oh, this one,” said the clerk and pointed to a big, empty box, sparse, its top wide open having only one door at the bottom. “This god claims to be god, in fact, *the* god but will never send us a statue, not even a picture. People put those things in his cathedrals but he ignores them. In fact, he rarely attends his own churches. He says they are too cluttered—with theology. “Christianity” is one of his major problems.

“Where *does* he attend?” I asked anxiously.

“It sounds illogical but I’ve heard he says “he inhabits the praises of his people,” so I presume he could be anywhere or everywhere. He attends when even only two or three fans might be at a location as long as he is acknowledged as being God. In fact, he comes if only one entity wants him.”

“But he *is* everywhere?”

“Oh, he says in his literature that he is everywhere, even in this box (you see, we ask that each religious entity displayed here uses only a box). But he also lives out of the box.

He's always available. He says," the clerk paused: 'a resemblance could not portray his glory'."

"Such wonderful audacity on the part of a god surely deserves more scrutiny, doesn't it?" I asked Bob.

"Definitely," he said and turned to the clerk. "Did this god leave a catalogue, Sir?"

"Not a catalogue, but sometimes a representative (it has the word ghost in it) flies in to be sure the box stays empty. He does leave this book – and it is free." He handed the book to me.

"Thank you, thank you." I cried.

"Oh, one moment," said Bob. "What about the atheist's box?"

"Ah," murmured the clerk, "he does not have one."

"Oh," said Bob, momentarily off his usual verbal balance, "but, of course, since an atheist believes God doesn't exist, naturally, he would not be represented here."

I tasted a page as we left.

"Isadore, do you want to know what I think about God?"

"Of course, Bob. I want as many opinions as I can get."

As Bob left me off, he handed me his latest ideas. "This is what I told Mary, and these are on paper, not skins. We can discuss it when I come again," he smiled.

That evening after our buffet dinner from the trough, I brought Bob's treatise out and settled down to read.

"You should hear about my grandpere," he had written. "He dropped the hyphen from our name right through the living room floor, hitting my uncle on the head. This started the rumor that there was a God. It bounced off and hit my aunt, who started the rumor that there were poltergeists who went around throwing hyphens as God was too proud, and the poltergeists were too chicken to throw anything bigger. But sometimes God would throw entire sentences. Some ingenious merchants named the Habiru put a bunch of them together and made a book which they sold all through the Middle East. They joked about it and called it the By Bull."

"Bob, did you mean by Baal? I asked when he returned. "His name was on one of those boxes?"

“No, Izzy, I was kidding. Actually . . . I’ve since reconsidered:

I came from a channel much different from yours to my meeting with God. No less, I feel, a moral channel, in spite of the possible face my experience might put on it, for I have since early youth on been searching for goodness, purity, righteousness, kindness, mercy and answers to the ills of the world, my own perplexities and the insistent yearning within me toward that almost apprehensible power, voice, entity beyond me—a quest absolutely common to all I’m convinced. I don’t really know what label you’d put on my religious orientation. Nor on yours. And I don’t know where personal and local custom end and the essentiality of God begins.

“I don’t either,” I said. I don’t even know what the essentiality of God is I thought.

But Bob continued. I waited to find out more:

I’ve been accused of being universalistic, pantheistic, liberal—and maybe I am. All I know is: there are questions in life. They fall into two categories: the universal ones of ontology, sociology, etc. (the problems of mankind in general) and the particular ones of each man (daily bread, freedom from fear and alienation, needs). In answer to these questions in these two categories I have read literally millions of words, all issued by voices claiming authority (not excluding the Bible). And I could see no answers in any of them, judging by empirical evidence. And yet still the urging within to reach out for another beyond my own mind and heart for the solution.

“And . . . ?” The only part of the foregoing I had understood was “daily bread and freedom from fear.

“And I found it. I met God in a deep, real, permanent experience which is valid for me to this day as the only piece of actual reality I can stand firm on. And my appeal to that experience, that source, to God on the basis of our meeting is always acted on by Him, irrespective of my Bible reading habits at the time, my being or not being ‘right’ with God, my state, be it sinful or sinless. In short, when, out of whatever context, I commune (pray to, talk to, yell at, supplicate, praise, whatever) with God. I get feedback which is relevant to my state: good, bad, but never indifferent. This is really the essentiality of my religion. The rest is custom, preference, whimsy, swings between asceticism (oh, by inclination, I’m ascetic, did you know that?). Of course, you don’t . . . yet.”

“Ach,” I said. I could not admit to more ignorance. But ‘ach’ is an all purpose solution I hoped.

That evening Bob said he had made a conference call to my mistress regarding my concern over the lack of spontaneous water. “Iz,” he said, “Mary said she could not afford fences. Besides she doesn’t like them. She thought if we added grain to your

menu that would be your fence, a magnetic fence. Isn't that a kind of luxury? And then you'll be content with the bucket water. And will you be wanting more dictionaries?"

"Not a dictionary, Bob, but maybe another book from the religion store. I found some goats in the book. And guess what?"

Bob raised his eyebrows.

"It will take all four stomachs for me to *begin* understanding God. I did though also learn something for myself. It's not as esoteric, as learned as your treatise, but interesting."

"Huh?" asked Bob, lighting another cigarette.

"God is an equal opportunity boss: In Ecclesiastes 3:18 it says: 'that they {the sons of men} might see that they *themselves* are beasts' {for in 3:19} that which befalls the sons of men befalls beasts; even one thing befalls them: as the one dieth so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man has *no* preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go to one place.' Bob, what do you think? I seem to be eating the word—fast."

"I'm flummoxed," said Bob. "No wonder women call us 'beasts'."

And soon we found we had unlimited grain. The sacks kept coming and 'Oly and I crunched at leisure. "But don't get enterotoxemia," said Bob. And I thought why is it that every benefit seems to have its toxic counterpart.

"That means, 'Oly, to counteract the liabilities of too much grain you mustn't eat too much; the book from the box says 'no ravenous beast shall be there.' Isaiah 35:9!"

"Ma, who is this Isaiah? Is he putting words into your mouth, too? And he wants me to go on a diet," sighed 'Oly who was nibbling nearby, "but now we have to stay home anyway to maintain our security system in case the raccoons find this cache. Or Mary's locked drawer inside? I've heard other goodies are there. Of course, if I tell the raccoons they can't go to heaven if they eat too much, they'll be good, won't they? I'll be their superintendent."

That we were in the hands of a novice was so apparent. We were to be raised without the assistance of the revered *Book of the Goat* by Holmes Pegler (the Dr. Spock of the Capri), a book published in 1875, hailed as the most expert summary of our species. Might another book do, I had asked, like *Goat Husbandry* by David MacKenzie? "Oh, Isadore," Mary said the next weekend, "budgetary and other controls would limit the application of suggested procedures from these sources also. Maybe I should just consult normal human parenting philosophies: You are mature but it's true 'Oly does need some guidance; he is still young and impressionable."

I said to Mary, "but please don't be a helicopter parent."

She laughed. “I can only hover on the weekends so you don’t need to worry—too much. I think I will just consult Dr. Spock. Except we don’t have television. We don’t even have electricity,” she added proudly. That was a disappointment: because we had hoped to live inside the glass hut and watch TV, our latest ambition. “But Izzy,” she said. “I was not reared by any expert—Dr. Spock’s book did not make it to our house. I had a German grandmother instead.”

“Ach,” I said, “how did you grow up at all without these modern conveniences? And I think we can cope without *Book of the Goat*,” I added graciously. “After all, ‘Oly and I had planned to eat the book anyway.”

And when I considered our situation more, I realized we had excellent cuisine, perhaps too much for there was virtually no competition from the traditional sources, the cow or sheep. The cows in our vicinity belonged to Ernie Gann and were fenced! It was only the neighbor who was unfenced. Where the pond was.

Afterwards I browsed outside in our own intimate pasture ignoring a thistle that brazenly presented itself to me. “I do not lower myself to eat you for I am now a ‘fair lady’,” I said in my most withering terms and picked out an enticing wild strawberry that was even lower in altitude instead. I was content (even though that word “tent” seems to appear too often).

I had promised to stay home so why do I like our neighbor’s real estate? He has water even though there we have to share it with several varieties of bugs and jumping fish. What is more serious competition is that he has bigger blackberries than ours. And once he had a garden but now even the scarecrow looks withered—he should—he doesn’t have any more challenges. Even the crows ignore him. It’s a pity to lose one’s career, I thought. Does he get unemployment? I really should give more consideration to my own future; I will soon be a senior citizen. And I picked up the book again that I had received from the god who lived basically out of the box.

On Bob’s next visit, and while we puffed, he said, “Izzy, you and ‘Oly also should choose a political philosophy.”

“Are there any of those philosophies in empty boxes?” I asked.

“Oh, yes,” he said, “most of the boxes are totally empty.” These are some: democracy, anarchy, oligarchy, autocracy, dictatorship, monarchy. Democracy is the most popular philosophy here.”

“But its phonetics has the word ‘mock’ in it,” I cried. “It doesn’t sound transparent.”

But I found I had been seduced; I wanted to ‘belong.’ I said, “I know ‘Olyphant would like to be a monarchist. He already is. But can he be entrusted to found a dynasty? Maybe an oligarchy would be preferred. Which one interests you, Bob?”

“Oh, I probably would choose autocracy—for my car.”

“What about yourself, Izzy?” Bob asked.

I consulted my rumen, then said: “I think I would like to be a dictator—since I will be dictating my book. Otherwise, I would choose to be eclectic. Then I could choose from all categories—whichever issue might be needed on any occasion, like now.”

“What issue do you want to take up?”

“I want to charge death with discrimination.”

“What?” asked Bob, “do you mean?”

“Bob, you know that death discriminates. In my opinion, death seems to select older persons much more than younger ones to die. And since I am getting older, of course, I am concerned about age discrimination.”

Bob laughed: “By the way, Iz, did you learn anything more after our tour to find a religion?”

“Bob, I’ve learned a lot.”

“For instance?”

“Well, I learned that the goat is a clean animal.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means that I am qualified as ‘clean’ because I have the cloven hoof and chew the cud. And that means that I am basically a vegetarian and my blood is purer.”

Bob laughed. “Hitler would have been impressed and you certainly do chew your cud. My cud is tobacco.”

“But being ‘clean’ is bad in a way.”

Bob raised his eyebrows.

“The bad way is that goats can be sacrificed; so can lambs and other animals. And somehow that pleases the god in the empty box.”

“Oh . . . Isadore, he’s trying to cover for our sins but he can’t keep up with them. He can only accept a clean sacrifice to substitute for the impure, for the mistakes we make. He

himself had to sacrifice some animals in the very beginning in order to make clothes for Adam and Eve.

“I thought it was Eve that took the first bite. And she blamed the snake.”

“Well, she did but you know how men are—Adam blamed Eve. That’s partly why God had to make so many more animals—so this could be ‘covered’.” But he manufactured just one son. And we started over. Our last chance. Of course, we continue to do it anyway,” he added sadly. “In other ways.”

“Bob, may I see your foot?”

“Of course, Izzy.” And Bob laughed. He took off his shoe and stocking and held out his foot.

“Bob,” I said when I had looked at his toes. “You are not cloven footed. Do you chew the cud?”

Bob laughed again. “No, you know I only chew tobacco.”

“Oh, dear. What about Mary?”

“I don’t know. She wears boots so much *and* can be so mischievous, maybe she is cloven footed. But she doesn’t chew the cud; she doesn’t chew tobacco; she chews candy bars.”

“If she doesn’t have cloven feet or doesn’t chew the cud, she is unclean, too.”

Bob laughed: “Izzy, she would be anyway, tramping around out here.”

“It means you both are fortunate.” I sighed. You are exempt from being sacrificed. Are all humans the same?”

“I would imagine so.”

“Then they cannot be sacrifices either.”

“But most humans, particularly men, get sacrificed in war. In earlier cultures they *and* their families *were* sacrificed.”

“But a wiser warrior would sacrifice all the women because they produce the men.” I said. “If no men existed, there would be no wars. We would really have arms control.”

“Izzy, we do need arms control. That’s partly how we get more women.”

I knew I was supposed to react but not how. Then an intense idea hit me. “Bob, I know God gets criticized so much about his war strategy. Remember, at times, he had both the men and women killed. Then the following generation would not be able to reproduce and it would nullify the wars? Then there would be time to teach peace.”

“In the book Job (35:11) says: ‘God teaches humans *more* than the beasts of the earth and makes us wiser than the fowls of heaven.’ Doesn’t that mean people?”

“Yes,” said Bob slowly. “And so you’ve already met Job.”

“I read almost every evening. I’ve met a lot of those men. But if God teaches people more than us animals, then they should know better.”

“Isadore, yes and I should begin chewing hay.”

I relaxed. What a quandary. What was the solution? I thought as I consulted my cud. But I hadn’t eaten within the last few hours. There was nothing left in my fourth stomach to digest. I applied myself to the trough. As I ruminated in the hay afterwards, I wondered. If God was so perfect why did he make his first man and woman imperfect?

“Bob?” I bleated.

“Isadore, I’m still here.”

“Bob, why did God make men imperfect and I suppose even us although I know ‘Oly wouldn’t admit that?”

“Oh, Izzy, it was so men would choose God because they wanted to, not because they were forced to.”

I went back to the trough. I needed more grain to ruminate.

And who should now visit but a critic—about our grain inventory.

I heard her say to Mary: “I hear your goats get more grain than a 400 pound steer.”

I came out of the stable chewing my grain. I felt it obligatory to intervene in this case: “We aren’t only supporting ourselves. We need that extra grain for our worms. They are not self supporting.”

And then a literary critic came by. He had read my manuscript and found it lacking in several items: character delineation, site establishment and, furthermore, punctuation authenticity: it looked like the Morse code; it needed cohesiveness, he said. I showed him Bob’s story of the origin of the By Bull and its source: the misplaced hyphen.

He left, rather hastily, I thought.



Character Delineation (under Protest)

I think I would rather do character assassination but after a visit to the trough, I decided to cooperate; I would delineate a character: my son. The critic is partly correct I ruminated. I thought our characters could delineate themselves—by their actions but there could be bias in that procedure. The real problem is that I don't want to delineate my son because he does have grave deficiencies, even if he looks so modest. What I could *delineate* are the usual excuses: he is socially disadvantaged, his parents were separated, he was moved several times, he has had little cultural enrichment (although he doesn't really demand it—grain is all the enrichment he likes).



And Bob discusses philosophy with him: “Hume, Kant, Hegel, that trio essentially in the empirical-existential camp, are like the English. And English is really only a fairly heavily romanticized German. At any rate, both the German and the English are concerned mainly with phenomena and their application, and if the ideals don't fit, hang them and induce some new ones. Like Luther: it's no mean feat to free an entire world from the *noblesse oblige* of exigetal dictatorship and virtually create an entire language in the bargain. He would have been my all-time unblemished hero had he not wound up, as so many, in leaning on the Jews. And there are not too many candidates left for heroes.” We're all waiting for Zechariah and Revelation. So we can get together.

At the word “leaning,” I saw ‘Oly lean on Bob with one horn. And Bob obliged by filling his grain bucket. “I am not certain if this lecture penetrated.” Bob mused.

On the positive side, our mistress sees that we are culturally enriched on the weekends by remote, KING-FM, the classical station which dribbles down to us from upstairs. Aren't Mozart and Beethoven and Bach enough culture? On the island, right here Bach made certain that:”



Sheep may safely graze

Have I enumerated enough ideas to establish culture for ‘Oly? I might say that he perplexes me, too. Perhaps it is the overly permissive environmental conditions here.

Almost every social contact was to be an ordeal. I had not read the goat book yet either. I just knew that my other sons were eventually killed; it was only dehorned goats that seemed to become socially acceptable. I waited anxiously for Mary’s opinion. She had been worried about ‘Oly, also, she said. She had read the goat book but learned that to dehorn ‘Oly now was too late—it would be excruciatingly painful. She decided to become a toreador instead, that is, she would challenge ‘Oly; she would win and he might be embarrassed and give up this career. Then one day when there was a gashed skirt and torn jeans, she was the one that gave up on the career and tried to coax ‘Oly into less severe playacting. ‘Oly was too egocentric; he had too much pride in his horns. Yes, he was gifted but only as a demolition expert. I waited for his execution.

But it didn’t come. One day I heard my mistress say she was supposed to have saved his life. It would be a contradiction to kill him. Of course, there was always Spieden Island where a wild goat herd ran. But would we get him there on the boat without being gored in the process. And how would his absence affect my emotional state? Was there a goat psychologist on the island to determine the effects for me? I was so flattered. I didn’t know I was such an integral part of our new program. My mistress had almost majored in psychology and knew what questions to ask. It was only the answers she didn’t know. And ‘Oly stayed. But, ah, more liabilities! But how he helped the peripheral economy.

One day, Mary permitted castration and when my son recovered from this indignity--his ego having been more carefully bandaged than even the affected organ--he was more reserved. My mistress had told her friends that the goat book said that the cute little kid would grow up to be ferocious but she had always said, “not my goat.” Alas, later she admitted her goat was even worse.

And I reluctantly agreed. My bobbing billy is becoming a bully. But when he is not rearing nor practicing his goring techniques, he does have his limpid movements. He



even waits for his turn to be petted unless it is my turn in which case he rushes in to demand his own rights first. I've even admitted to another weakness—he's terribly jealous. In fact, it's hard to find an asset to my son other than the aforesaid liabilities resource. It's only in the evening when he unwinds I see him as a precious little kid again. My one conclusion is that he must take after his father.

It was at this time that we were assigned our careers. We needed to have a practical vocation or, at least, the appearance of one. After due deliberation, Carol, our neighbor, dubbed him her "watch" goat (when he could

be persuaded to leave the trough). Consequently, he was the designated security guard. It was an honorable profession and he rehearsed daily on the house infrastructure in order to be a skilled pugilist. My own title was to be "author in residence." I was to continue dictating my book. I began to study Napoleon considering from what I heard that he might be a proper role model for a liberator upgrading to a dictator. If not, I could consider Alexander the Great for the offense.

The next time, our neighbor shouted that we ate his fruit trees my mistress was quite disgusted. She told him that the deer eat our trees and she would only believe him if he produced a photo of us caught in the act. I remained silent. "Ma, Isn't there a law that says we do not need to incriminate ourselves?" muttered 'Oly as we left. I noticed he had refrained from using his horns. And I had refrained from using Alexander.

And, Bob, what career are you going to assume—after you feed us, of course.

"My rowboat hasn't come in; not even an oar has showed up."

I was grateful the "ship" was delayed: if we could just have Bob full time.

But now I've forgotten what I was supposed to delineate for the critic. I think I am through with character delineation. Was it site establishment?

I had consulted the brochures since Mary said she could not arrange suitable tour transportation for us. But even right here on our own site, the scenery is lovely and will please anyone. I will show you and then I will resort, like Bob said, to newly minted words to explain the island. It even requires a new chapter. I shook out my set of colored words.



Site Establishment

“Ma, what is writing?” ‘Oly.

“It’s a system whereby the pen conveys thoughts and actions. You can’t imagine what can happen in just one page.”

“Well, you’ve written a lot but little has happened, Ma.” said ‘Oly as he tripped up to the trough.

“‘Oly, the best authors can make poverty seem rich.”

“Oh, I don’t want to be in poverty even if it is rich.”

“But thoughts keep their power even if the ink fades. I have expressed thoughts and after they are inked in, they travel all over, just as you travel to the trough meticulously”

“Let me splash some water from the pond on what you’ve written.” said ‘Oly. “Then you could have invisible ink.”

“But then we could not take the trip to see ‘site establishment.’ The brochure would be erased. Of course, it’s easier just to imagine it; then we don’t need to use gas. I could just as well have us go somewhere else, at least for the day.” I could hear the raindrops tiptoeing on the roof and relaxed against my hay bale. Ah, an excuse.

“Where *do* you want to go, ‘Oly, with your imagination and with whom? We can practice site establishment right here.”

“Isn’t there an Agatha Christie?” asked ‘Oly?

“Yes, but how did you know about her?” I asked quite amazed. I hadn’t seen ‘Oly taking any books out of our cuds.

“Yesterday, I heard Bob and Mary talking about her. They said she lived far away in fascinating England, a country that had castles and labyrinths where all sorts of things can happen—on just one page, too. The author serves tea with ink in it to her characters and there are all sorts of goodies on the side bars, even arsenic.”

“I didn’t realize you were listening. Yes, I heard that, too. Then there is James Bond. Bob likes him because he gets to drink Scotch.”

“No, I want to be sure the author lets me eat. I heard some of the authors even have a chef on hand with efficient culinary talents. The reader is assured of board and room during his entire literary stay.”

“Then we can’t have any CIA heroes. They don’t even get to eat and have to spend so much time in alleys. But I think there are some authors who dine daily and only permit crimes and such to occur between eight and five. And then there was Sherlock Holmes. He was meticulous – and didn’t like dust on his trousers. We couldn’t emulate that— even though he was so very smart. There was an author Peacock who strutted about with his feathered, plumaged vocabulary. If we cited him, I would use all my colored words up.”

“I wish your ghoat writer would like cooking.”

“My ghoat writer? That is supposed to be a secret. You can’t see a “ghoat.”

And he would not let me in the “Upper Room” at all.

“Well, last time you were upstairs, you ate the centerpiece.

“Where were all these authors? I want to go there.”

“‘Oly, there is always a ‘there.’ And always a ‘here.’ It is always ‘here’ when you are the main character. You always like ‘there’ because it isn’t ‘here’. But, ‘Oly, since we can’t go ‘there,’ ‘here’ is a wonderful place.”



“This is our home and it might even get in our book.”

“Ma, ‘here’ is beautiful; and look at the sun. It’s sitting so complacently in that cloud, as though it’s wearing an Elizabethan ruff.”

“You made a simile. We have to tell Bob you did one. If the ghoat writer will let it stay in the book. Maybe it’s not austere enough. But I studied the brochures and I will take you on a tour of events that happened right here on the island. I’m even quoting so I know the words are officially approved—by someone.”

‘Oly sat up. “The ghoat writer?”

“Maybe. Our ‘ghoat writer’ is quite ubiquitous but I can’t find him. Listen. The San Juan Islands were once glaciated; they were a geological spur (ah, there is that spur that Bob told me I lived on) of an extinct volcano (I hope it’s extinct) and when the last ice age melted”

“Ma,” ‘Oly interrupted: “someone has to melt those words so I don’t get cold.”

“‘Oly, we’re almost over that age. In fact, we may melt more. These islands did. At least 400 stayed in place but only 172 have names. And we may get more if global warming temperatures go up. That’s what happened a long time ago in 1588. The islands that disappear at high tide are considered as orphans. They liked being cuddled up near Canada, yet east enough to have status on their own. The tides dabbled at their feet, and cleaned the beaches of debris. The Indians, the Salish tribe began camping here and remnants of the migrant tribes across the Bering Strait crept in from the north. Life was casual and rich and then we were noticed by the Europeans.

One in particular, Juan de Fuca, sailed up here from Mexico in 1592. The viceroy had ordered a small armada out that year—the ghoat writer thinks he was celebrating the centennial of Christopher Columbus—but de Fuca’s voyage was recorded in the Spanish archives under the name of Zu Rroco (Zuan de Rroco)—a dot had been misplaced where the letter “F” had been the translator believed. Things get complicated when diacritical marks are involved.”

“When is he going to decide on what his name is?” queried ‘Oly.

“Oh, when the experts decide on which dot wins the contest,” I assume. “Anyway, de Fuca sailed to Spain for his expected award but was notified by Philip II that the country was bankrupt from spending Mexico’s gold on its northern campaign in Holland. De Fuca therefore left Spain with his map (a capital offense) and returned to his native home on the Island of Cephalonia. His story was ‘footed’ down by Michael Locke, an English official who entered it in the Purchas’ annals. That de Fuca had taken his map with him was considered a criminal offense by Spain, therefore attracted the attention of the Inquisition. But he made it back to Greece, but may have been excised from Spain’s original annals; they were “revised” in 1789. That was one of the strategies of the Inquisition.”

“Ma, that’s a mouthful. Let me get one of my own. I need more calories to be able to listen properly.” And ‘Oly trotted off to the trough.

“So,” I continued later: “Enough of the story leaked out to attract other explorers, mostly English, yet the Strait of Juan de Fuca exists in his memory. And then the Hudson Bay Company arrived. And the British Royal Marines.

“So did Americans from eastern United States, all eager to claim land. And on that island which is *this* island was an English pig which made the mistake of eating an American settler’s potatoes. A war almost ensued but was stamped by an American general who felt a war was not in the best interests of the public or other pigs. He suggested joint occupation instead, a suggestion saluted by the American soldiers, most of whom preferred joining the Civil War in the south because it was more exciting.

“What did the British marines want?” ‘Oly asked.

“They wanted to stay: they had planted jonquils.”

“But, finally in 1872, Kaiser Wilhelm I of Germany was asked to arbitrate the boundary dispute for which he appointed a panel who preferred, as was its international arbitration right, awarding the contested area, San Juan Island to the British. But . . . “

“Ma, please wait, I need another bite,” begged ‘Oly.

“the United States Secretary of State, Hamilton Fish prevented that right from being honored. Consequently, as *second* place, San Juan Island was awarded to the United States. Thus we acquired the island by defying international arbitration law. I must insert a comment here that I see the U.S. government (only at that time, of course) resembled you, ‘Oly—always wanting more.” I looked at him quizzically; he was fast asleep with his head in the trough.



I had felt a bit restive under my collar when first practicing this reading with Bob. Occasionally I was wearing ornaments around my neck and this story made my newest necklace creep up down into my conscience. But Bob added perspective saying I was an innocent party and need not, at least not at the moment, worry. I was to restrict worrying to current items. I liked this attitude as I find worries are extended to the maximum number of adherents, much of what is duplicated energy. If two worry about the same problem, it is excessive. And then I fell asleep on *my* podium.

And woke up with ‘Oly’s horn poking me. “Ma, finish the story.”

“We’ll both finish it. I’ll show you some favorite locations. I don’t even need to use *my* colored words; it might take my entire collection of them if I did. I’ll use Mary’s pictures instead.

This location is near the harbor where the Americans landed.
Now rabbits are the chief occupation forces.



“The view below is where the British Royal Marines occupied the northern end of the island.

Currently, Canadian Geese are the invaders.



And the block house occupied by the British Royal Marines.

“Eventually the occupying armies became friends and instead of fighting, entertained each other. The Kaiser ended the argument in 1872 with his (actually his panel’s reluctant decision) award to the United States. And now, every year, the war is reenacted.”

“Why was the panel reluctant?”

“Because they could not implement international arbitration law . . . they really wanted to give us to Britain. In fact, the Americans were more like you, very territorial.”

“I guess that’s where I learned my techniques, Ma. Maybe I could join an army.”

“Now the only army left is the tourists. San Juan Island bristles with tourists who come to see the occupation sites and look for Orca dolphins, our maritime guests who always come formally dressed for all occasions in their black and white tuxedos. They never know when Britain or Canada may claim San Juan Island for its own—and they would want to be correctly dressed.”

I thought about that and wondered what I would wear. I had talked so long the sun was thinking of going to bed in its frowning clouds. They did not like the decision either.

I looked in my closet to see what “equipment” I might have and was surprised to see that doo dads were there. Look at me now.

“Ma, you’re fit to meet the Queen. But you need gloves on your feet to shake her hand.”

“I will just shake her leg then.”





N'y

So we ambled along in our lives, now deeply entrenched in being residents of San Juan Island (and our neighbors) but frequenting our own stable enough to qualify for the fringe benefits, our grain and hay. We made certain we were there when Mary or Bob came.

And then, one day, Bob sent a cryptic note to Mary:

I pushed down the road to nowhere and started in second. By the time, the car was going, I couldn't reverse back up the hill. So I drove down further and managed to turn around; but I couldn't get it up the hill. I left it.

Later Ed said he would winch me out if I'd take his goat! I said OK (Idiot). He really *had* a goat.

And N'y arrived in a van; there was nothing cryptic about him: he was a well-adjusted, happy goat and without horns. Bob's car had found us a third party.

I was appalled. A rival. And 'Oly was already so disadvantaged. There was a strange silence that permeated our favorite knoll. Bob, Mary, I and 'Oly waited tenuously. And then 'Oly made the first move. What camp was he going to be in?

'Oly advanced to introduce himself, shaking not his foot but his horns. N'y waited . . . but we were to be surprised. Apparently N'y had been well educated. N'y feinted and 'Oly's horns whipped only the air. N'y skillfully slid by 'Oly; he reared; he ran; he pushed but he did not die on the battlefield. The war endured two days when a truce was declared and N'y was admitted to the trough. About one duel a day is fought now—it's standard procedure, convincing until they negotiate the peace by nuzzling noses. And suddenly I am aware that I do not get as many pokes from my son. He is too busy needling N'y.



We learned that previously N'y had a solitary life and even though unacclimated to grain adapted readily to our menu. But the critic came by and said: "Isadore," don't forget to delineate his character." I've hesitated because frankly I'm a bit jealous. N'y must have been dehorned and castrated early—on time—his horns nothing but bubbles. He is all the things 'Oly is not; he is gentle, sophisticated, the perfect host. He greets every visitor and bows! Visitors are enchanted and 'Oly and I wait in the background expecting attention that does not come. This does not improve 'Oly's disposition. And I made a mistake, too. When he first

came, I was strong and I buffeted him as well—after all he was superseding attention. And now, N’y returns my lack of hospitality with knocks of his own, not respecting my age. Nevertheless, we have reached a détente even without the advice of a Secretary of State. After vetting, he was unanimously appointed director of public relations.

It was recommended by the “committee” that N’y be initiated into our cozy alliance with all privileges of the rights to a religious and political affiliation or non affiliation. “Bob,” I said, N’y should choose to be an “ennyarchis? This is such a new word; I do not even know how to spell it. If N’y is phonetically ‘Enny,’ why couldn’t he be an enarchist?

“But, Izzy, in a democracy, *he* has to make that choice.”

“But you forget that I chose to be a dictator. N’y,” I called imperiously. He ambled over politely. “Do you want to be an anarchist? We don’t have one yet.”

“Isn’t that one who is against law and government—because it interferes with individual liberty?” he asked.

I look at Bob. He nods “yes.”

“Yes,” I said.

“I would love to be an *enarchist*,” N’y said.

“See,” I said to Bob. “I do make a good dictator. But may I have a cigarette? I wilt into an inferior status quickly. How can an inert thing like a cigarette dominate me?

“Bob,” I said, “Being a dictator is hard work. I am ready to go to the bar.”

He agrees and while we were drinking, I stopped suddenly: “Bob,” I commented “this martini tastes familiar; it’s like corn.” Bob laughs.

I feel an impulse to keep on imbibing. “Is this what happens to you, Bob?” He nodded sadly. “We could be Alcoholics Synonymous,” I said. And I just thought of something: I haven’t even finished delineating yet. Do I have to delineate the characteristics of Mary, of you and the other fans? Will I get to have more drinks? Am I already an alcoholic?”

But I learned during that session that neither Mary nor Bob wanted to be “delineated.” I am grateful for how can one describe the indescribable? I would have to spend the rest of my life in the dictionary and there would not be room to file everything on the tip of my tongue for my agent. By the way, where he is?

But there was a follow up: “Hi, Isadore,” said a visitor, “you still need to delineate something, vocations, if not character. Your hosts must do something besides give you pats on the back for your courage, your smooth adaptation to rural life.”

As I mentioned before, can't actions delineate characteristics? That seemed a fairly unobtrusive question. "Well, from my observation, it's extremely puzzling. Mary collects rain water off the roof into a tank now, so illogical, when we could easily troop to the neighbor's pond. And we get to drink it provided we don't drag the hose away. She struggles with hay bales from Ernie Gann's ranch but those she says are essential because that is how I obtain nutrients to my vocabulary.

"And she is addicted to building. She found out she could hammer nails and, later, that she could pound them into the right places, sometimes. She is good at drunken columns which other people must detoxify. When the outhouse was erected, she resisted all our efforts at supervision, and the resultant structure though standing does not resemble anything to which I was previously exposed. It has one great advantage: it has wall paper which we peel off and eat the glue. Our gazebo is another attraction, a performing arts center. 'Oly and N'y have fencing matches for which I am the judge, a bit biased, of course. And I've heard there are to be other 'additions.' Besides all this, she 'works'."

"What do you mean 'works'?" asked the visitor.

"She leaves here every Sunday and goes back to 'work'. Then she comes back every Saturday. And she also brings me cartons of vocabulary, vocabulary that is guaranteed to work in the bureaucratic age we live in. Of course, it's been thrown away; that is how she gets it. And once I chew it down, it gives nitrogen to the soil—my contribution to ecology.

"Waste management must also be happy with it."

"I've only heard her use the term 'waist management'."



"And you, Sir, what do you do?" asked the career specialist turning more hopefully to Bob.

"Well, I think it was most inconsiderate of Dad not to die rich and make me a spoiled, ne'er do well, wealthy idler, instead of just an ordinary ne'er do well . . . sometimes idler! It's lucky that I'm too clumsy to be a crook.

"Mostly, I wait for my ship to come in, but it seems to be delayed. Of course, Sir, you know that anyone who tends his 'p's and q's' can make himself valuable anytime. So I am trying to re-motivate, reinvent myself, and seek out fame and fortune in the romantic profession of dishwashing. Already I've gone to pot-washer, floor-swabber, garbage-dumper and even grill-cleaner. And in just a few short months! Where is there left to go? No, you don't have to go (the critic was taking out his keys); I'm just being rhetorical.

“I think the truth is that I am misplaced in this profession. I just have to confess that I took on the task to impress Mary. I knew the mesmerizing effect the romance of dish-cleansing might have on her. Especially when I recount my accomplishments. In dishwashing, I have no peer among men.

“Oh, and before that, I wrote some radio and TV stuff for the Marines. That was in Oki and h’mmm, the rest I should not name. I chased words, dancing across my mind and imprisoned them to spit them out at the consumer-trained receptors which loosened the purse strings of the American hero, the customer. Sometimes we blushed a little and ran around disclaiming: ‘*caveat emptor*.’ (That was when I was imprisoned in the Brig.)

I tried to take out my dictionary but Bob was barging into his next paragraph.

“Sometimes we would say, ‘I’m sick of this—glad I’ve got my novel to turn to.’ (We *all* had a novel to turn to.) One thing we could not ask was ‘How’s the novel coming? Because we were all honest men, not liars’. You see, writers are not liars. They are . . . well, creative. Anyway, if faced with that question, they say: ‘I’m just off now to turn on my computer.’ Or ‘Well, the research is coming along fine.

“I was writing a novel. It was entitled *Tobacco Alley*. I was going to entitle it *Tobacco Road* but some smart mouth named Faulkner got the jump on me, so I changed it. They did a play on it and everything. Bribery there, obviously. Even took my characters.

The critic was transfixed. He opened his mouth but . . .

“And then I got religion. And I read the Bible. And a new thought struck me. Why don’t I translate this? Cast it into modern English. This Aramaic is so difficult. The Hebrew wasn’t so hard because I had seen *The Ten Commandments*. Anyway, that idea went down the tube. You know, that smart limey James beat me to it. And then I had a real inspiration: I’d been a great admirer of that wise old bear, Churchill.—only I would call my bear, Pooh. But he bit me.

“In the meantime, I’ve got a deal in the mill. Nothing world shaking, you know, but it’s in my line. The town is going to put out new street signs and they asked me to edit them. You know, they don’t want to come off illiterate with all the tourists. I had to take a civil service test. I did fine in it—got all the letters in my name right – but flunked on my address. Never was good at math. I still got a score of 32. That was highest out of 347 applicants.”

“Is there anything more you would like to know, Sir?”

“I’m totally impressed,” burbled the critic. “See ya.”

So you see we live in a paradise yet Mary reminded me the next weekend she came that a snake also lived in the Garden of Eden. Where was it? I wondered. Where was the

snake? Here are only the shy, unobtrusive garters. They can't be the problem for I heard Oliphant and N'y were to be made into "Knights of the Garter." And I checked the trough; they weren't there. Excessive patrolling, I thought. Didn't 'Oly and N'y investigate regularly? I relaxed. And then one night there was a gunshot. But I didn't say anything.

When our trough collapsed one day, Mary fed us individually—each one of us having his/her own bucket. 'Oly was most confused, traveling in desperation to each one—not knowing how to eat in all three at once. I held on to my pail, putting my snout in which helped keep out 'Oly's horns. Still I noticed my skin hung on me, several sizes too large. I must just eat more.



Oops, the critic was back. "I forgot: you forgot to delineate the neighbors," he muttered. He had left his motor running.

I looked at him. I don't think I should make an in-depth statement about our neighbor. Right now Carol is in-depth in the neighbor's pond. When I first saw this maneuver by her and Mary, I bleated assiduously for my meal ticket had disappeared into the water; only their heads showed. And yet they came out, intact. But I did not want to see the trick again. Especially since no tickets had been left with me. Of course, I would have eaten them.

I guess I had deliberated enough; I guess it's best to wade in. Finally, I said: "Carol informed me that she was soon going to leave her trough here and relocate to *civilization*, town, where heat, light and water reign." I said to the expert.

"She's moving?" he asked.

"Yes, unfortunately."

"In that case, you are allowed an exception. You do not need to delineate your neighbor, particularly if she's in the pond. I do not interview when I go swimming."



‘Oly agrees and wants us to know that to celebrate the completion of delineation, he wants to be rewarded with a long walk.

“Speaking of our walks: there is goat etiquette. When a human is present, we goats prefer him or her to go ahead. You see, then the spiderwebs are broken. We are so polite.”



Speaking of Etiquette

Mary does not socialize properly, we felt. In Europe, the newcomer makes the first call and although this is not American protocol, I suggested since we were originally Swiss, it might be appropriate to initiate the social overture—in our case, visits. Of course, the fact that the neighbor had various inducements, i.e., vegetation, had, of course, contributed to our venture.

The first friendly attempts were camouflaged. Carol had been our legitimate entry card because she had cooked at the neighboring trailer. In due time, we were notified that our frequent calls were not appreciated and our neighboring owner was going to file a suit. This was distressing and though we were guileless I deemed it unnecessary to pursue this contact further. (We had already annihilated his blackberry patch sufficiently.)

‘Oly, N’y and I made further explorations further away, one day hoofing it an entire mile where we found, to our delight, another set of goats, Nubians, whose owners were also building a house. They, however, did not need a demolition expert. With their smooth coats, they were so affluent. We plodded home. Maybe we should observe the American custom and wait for visitors on our own turf. Our neighbors agreed!

Weeks went by in langorous splendor for winter had forgotten us, we thought. Bob never failed to visit, bringing grain and more words and sometimes stayed to play. We decided another social call might be in order, this to another nearby neighbor with goats and sheep. I could see sheep first hand and observe why they were to be located at God’s *right* hand and test out the Biblical association with this configuration. Suddenly on the way, I remembered that the sheep and goat combination was sacrificial. What if goats were needed at our destination to complete the equation? We returned home.

Unknown to me, my absentee mistress had been frantically seeking what is called a “job” on our island. In this way, she could stay with us while we thoroughly acclimated; Bob could devote more time in his career looking for his “ship” while placating dishes and rise

quickly to prominence. Juggling schedules, want ads and availability was a hefty situation but finally success: an interview at the San Juan County's Sheriff's Department.

I heard her tell someone afterward that the officials responsible for interviewing had asked her the motive for relocating. She had said, "I have three goats oh, and yes, a house." They concurred this was reasonable motivation. At that moment, the telephone had rung and the secretary came in to ask her if she didn't own three goats. And that the subject three goats had just been reported walking down Bailer Hill Road in a stock area. She got the job. And left to get the goats. "Darlings," she said as we walked home, now you can be motivational counselors." I didn't tell her that we were on our way to the Sheriff's to report her as a missing person.

Two weeks later she was living in our house. "Isadore," she said, "it's my house but it's yours, too." We had hoped she would live in the stable and we could move "upstairs." We had a summit meeting and concurred that we would refrain from further visits for awhile. That might gain us a few points so we could attain upward mobility.

We had, we knew, found that job for Mary and were now experienced headhunters. She stayed until the next summer so we could become properly acclimated. Her schedule to "keep the island safe" was from midnight to 8:00 am although I wondered if the department had chosen well. Conversely, she had trained with 'Oly somewhat and had a few advantageous techniques. The advantage was that with this schedule, we had unchaperoned nightlife and slept in the day time as she did. "But you were a member of the jet set," I reminded her. Will you miss that?"

"No," she laughed, "and some residents here commute to Minnesota, to Colorado and even the Antarctica; Izzy, I belong to the debt and wet set."

And we decided to commute again ourselves, to socialize. These calls were becoming contagious. We were, after all, proxies for our mistress. One day she arrived home when we were, well, gone. She set out to find us and did—not quite in the capacity she would want—again on the road. But this time, my foot hurt and she looked at me thoughtfully. "Isadore, if you can't walk so well, you'll want to stay home more." And I couldn't bear to tell her we had been visiting the rabbits who had taken us on a tour, showing off their subversive routes: their corridors where a casino might lurk and where *we* could also be considered as the jet set. But I relented and confessed.

"How about the bet set?" she suggested.



Conferences

I suppose at this juncture I could discuss my physical condition again. I deliberated over my contribution to society wondering if this might be the time to change careers, upgrading to the full time occupation of ill health. As soon as it was discovered that I had an ailment, all my constituents convened to submit diagnoses:

Hoof rot
Bursitis
Arthritis
Worms
Tuberculosis
Cancer

Mary recited all the good care I was receiving when the veterinarian visited.

“Don’t pamper her,” was the surprising answer. “I knew once of a \$20,000 goat that was put in a new cement stable with wooden walls *and* a television set. You know what? He died!”

In spite of my woes, I listened attentively. We had no TV or cell phones but had we been contaminated by radio. Would listening to a Caesar Franck sonata for violin and piano and a biography of George Eliot be fatal?

Dr. Spencer turned his attention to ‘Oly whose aggressive forms of hospitality had been neutralized by a knot tied about his head like a noose. He reluctantly extended his hooves to the vet for analysis and the scissors. N’y, precocious as usual, had immediately summed up the situation and kept a slippery distance away. My pedicure was the last and when the vet had put his clippers away, I wobbled to my feet and found myself facing a pair of forceps and one orange pill. I backed away but Mary, held me firmly. One more foe to face, I thought: the cure.

Still the attention was flattering. As being ill would curtail my peregrinations I maintained my composure, trying to select the specialty assured to elicit the most sympathy but least deprivation. I cultivated my seductive cough—a hoarse, compassionate emission occasionally accompanied by catarrh. Of the options presented, I decided to claim hypochondria.



My medicinal prescription at the time of my arrival was one cigarette each month but as is earlier implied I could be beguiling, especially with Bob and my mistress having observed (and cooperated with) my attachment to the “weed.” She had pronounced her own verdict: smoker’s cough complicated by emphysema.

In short, I am thin. This caused more alarm and eventually my mistress visited the vet and came home with another pill and a plastic gun. I took one look at them and turned away. For I reasoned if I got well, I would lose all the sympathy and attention surrounding my “case.” “Isadore,” said my

mistress,” you are much more sophisticated than you pretend.” I trotted off. I had hoped in this remote area I was forever immunized against medical care. Bob appeared but not in the guise of friendship. He pried my jaws apart and down went the pill. It wasn’t even sugar coated. And it didn’t work. “Bob,” I suggested, “let’s go back to more cigarettes.”

Then one day came a college student majoring in “life.” I liked her prescription: Drum’s tobacco. She carefully took out a wad. I loved it, but I still stayed thin. I didn’t know she had suggested an alternate plan: the pumpkin seed cure, should I have tapeworms. My mistress bided her time and planned to trick ‘er treat. I must say that I do not feel sick. I love my hay (and each time more words come with it) and I am essential to my son. He needs me as an alternate victim to butt.

As you might guess, our traditions are in the formative stage. We only knew that as winter approached, we, according to musical legends, are supposed to “lowe” at an appropriate time in the winter. We don’t know for certain if goats were included on that fateful night, December 24th. I had not yet had my formal theological training but thought it would not be godlike of God to exclude us.

It was night; winter had arrived, apologetic for being late; it was cold, the leaves marcescent, too withered to have enough energy to fall. ‘Oly, N’y and I huddled in the stable in close formation when what should appear to our wondering eyes but Mary, Carol and Bob with lighted candles singing “Away in the Manger.” “The manger,” I thought; that is right here with us always. . . and I was comforted. I really must start seminary. Christmas morning, 75 candles burned in the “upper room” and Mary, gaily decked, tied a Christmas tree to our entrance column. Our decorations were hastily consumed, popcorn and cranberries. I’m becoming nostalgic. I must make an effort to get up. I wonder if this is lumbago. That is a popular ailment in Victorian novels and maybe Mary would take me there to rehabilitate.



Winter decided to stay awhile. It was now rather severe for these parts, I was told. Our water supply froze before we could get to it. But there was still snow on the ground, and a fire to melt it, promised Mary. She took the ax and chopped the ice out for us to imbibe the sweet elixir. The wet carpet shagged into vertical tufts which also froze and dried with the reluctant leaves. No wonder the critics say “stay away in the winter” and many residents fly to the south. One must understand though that it is irresistible to a goat to show her vocabulary off. Consequently, we devoted winter in contemplation of participles that dangle. Or deciding whether to use the dative or accusative tenses. (‘Oly always insists on accusative.) Instead, I will cover my tumescent knees with more hay from Ernie Gann. It’s time for a prolonged snooze, long enough to absorb all the new words I am acquiring, long enough to last until spring. I wonder where all the critics are.



Uh, Oh



As spring poked its head around the weather corner, we devised several introductory stances to receive our guests for the season. The morning and late afternoon poses generally occur on a rock near the house. ‘Oly is naturally first, alert with his horns prominently displayed. N’y relaxes on the left ready to shake feet and I on the ledge. We can tell by the vibrations of the earth what type of visitor might be arriving, the whisper of a rabbit or the determined crunch of wheels. Today it was the crunch!

We heard squawks. ‘Oly, whose rural experiences were still somewhat limited, hoofed back to announce a brand new species. I hobbled out to observe and I saw chickens, chickens! Oh. Oh.

I noticed that my mistress was not to make the same mistake she did on us. The chickens were definitely to have a coop *before* they arrived, attested by the fact that they waited all afternoon in the vehicle while she built it. I was quite amused by this assiduous labor—the chickens even had a balcony—but she didn’t know that those chickens were Bantams and wouldn’t want a balcony. Only a high rise would suffice.

I wondered if she had done the pre-design work or the required geotechnical charts, the soil stability, and seismic hazard surveys. Would it be as big as Ernie Gann’s so my ghoat writer could finish my book? I did not see any rebar. Aren’t we part of the ‘ring of fire?’ I inquired of myself, there being no seismic expert in the vicinity to ask. Maybe Bob had taken the rebar for his spinal cord.

Nevertheless, we clustered about the new structure which, incidentally, adjoined our goatel to await the reappearance of the carpenter. Our mistress crawled out, very dusty; that was not unusual but it was the Bantams caught and crawling in that made me want to laugh.

Our new friends stayed inside a week, acclimating. They were in prison and I could hear them wailing and clucking about it. Our mistress gave them a paper to complete regarding their complaints. But all we could think about was how to get to their feed trough. I even told them I had been chained for two nights but at this empathy they were indignant: “we have only a dirt floor and who wants a lanai that tilts?” I could only tell them not to worry; things always change, especially here.

After the week of acclimating, she opened the door. Those chickens all flew out . . . and up. It was my mistress who was clucking now. “But they are all going to trees.”

“They’re Bantams; that is what Bantams do,” laughed Bob who had arrived chuckling. Once liberated, the Bantams had a glorious time. They adjusted quickly to their higher social status and the soaring eagles replaced the vain peacocks of the zoo. Papagano, named for its iridescent feathers, played the leading role and sang Mozartian thrills to his cohorts while I used up more of my colors. Even we became a source of interest. Until we noticed it was our grain supply, the sought-after commodity that was our key to popularity. I must say that their hours differed from ours. Their early alarm system sounded shrill when we just came stumbling in from our night out.

And then we learned they were gaining popularity with the hawks that had been making early reconnaissance flights as well. One morning the gallant Papagano crowed no longer. And Deborah, Papagano’s assistant became such a disciple, she turned into a rooster. In sympathy, so did the rest of the flock. “Oh,” said my mistress, ‘No wonder there haven’t been any eggs.’ All were certified as the male species. It dawned on me that our enclave seemed to specialize in male orphans.

And if we hadn't been so entranced watching our three remaining hens turn into roosters, we would have noticed the U2 flights overhead had resumed. And then there was only one. Only Deborah, rechristened Debro remained. Though the most reticent of the flock, he was well versed in security measures. He scuttled across the open spaces and pecked quickly at vegetation guarded by the wild rose bushes. We guarded him carefully; in return he sat on my back and vacuumed my hair. This was a new kind of cosmetology, I thought. We spoiled him. Only at night did he leave us for his perch in the fluffy boughs of the fir. But one morning, he did not crow . . . and neither did we. We could not even turn the coop into a Gann writing shed with colorful feathers as pens: it was too small. We stored all the vocabulary that I was accumulating instead.

After our period of mourning had passed, Bob who was still Coordinating Task Supervisor, had been accumulating an agenda for another summit meeting. When siphoning conversation through the floor to the stable, I found out that my mistress didn't know how to milk and, further, the goat book had stressed that regularity was of supreme importance. So she regularly did not milk. These factors contributed further to my life of ease. Then suddenly after talking with my technical advisor I felt guilty about depriving 'Oly of serotonin and began to produce milk again. I learned that Bob who previously refrained from mentioning he *did* have the talent of milking, confessed and armed with a broad interpretation of regularity, his own, came from town and milked every *other* day. The summit meeting concerned whether or not I should be "certified." Bob did the research: 'Olympia, Washington was several islands and 150 miles south (six hours for bacteria growth to grow). Wishing a more direct route, Mary gulped down a cup of my milk and waited a respectable amount of time for TB, meningitis, etc. to settle in. Negative results indicated that I was employable whereas my previous designation had been decorative. This was a problem because I wanted the latter category. But Bob produced the paperwork:

"We proudly present herewith the results of our meeting regarding certification for our goat, namely, Isadore. The experts (outstanding in their fields) voted unanimously to indicate that a further evaluation of the current analysis will be extended indefinitely.

Still, the ultimate decision of the summit meeting was "due to travel inconveniences and my age, I was not to attempt certification." I relaxed happily thanking governmental intricacies for my return to idle persiflage. This indolence I rationalized, was our own contribution to energy conservation. And I was willing to conserve a vast quantity. N'y who had previously existed chiefly on organic forays, voted willingly to continue his life of ease and since 'Oly was too busy eating to vote, the motion was passed by majority.

And nature added punctuation to this dilemma: Mt. St. Helens near 'Olympia began to assert its territorial rights and gave notice of a future explosion. Now we would have our own private volcano and private dirt baths. Definitely, we were not driving south.

It was to be a day marked by serious issues. Bob presented the next item on the meeting's agenda. "Izzy," he said, "some critics are arriving today; here's the latest Gann

hay—to enhance your vocabulary.” I stuffed it in my mouth. And then filed it in the chicken coop. What was happening to my new self made status of being only decorative?

The first critic who appeared fairly well thawed spoke glibly. He wanted to know again about our cultural opportunities. “Were they sufficient?” he asked.

The last piece of hay was crawling down my throat picking up words like glue. I hastily pointed out again that although we had neither piped music or TV in our stable, the radio news reports continued to dribble down from above. Isaac Stern played frequently, N’y and ‘Oly waltzed on the gazebo to Strauss. Rock and Roll, though appropriate for our era, blasted *infrequently*; but we did have occasional bleats from the BBC, our Canadian counterparts. Visitors were announced by a hunting horn.



We also had guests: the rats and mice in particular who rustled in for the refreshments and to share the latest psychological experimental results. After all, rat psychology was the style: most psychologists experimenting with rats to learn about human behavior. “Personally, I do not think we are culturally or intellectually deprived.” I summarized. “We even have opera occasionally. And as you heard, Papagano came here personally.”

My critic took out his pen and made a check on a piece of paper. But then he pounced on me for another issue: “Isadore, you don’t use the metaphor or simile properly; in fact, you rarely use them at all.” I reminded him that Bob preferred the austere literary style and that even life is a metaphor; furthermore, perhaps my beloved stenographer, Mary, (my instant, standard rationalization) may have misinterpreted my dictatorial bleats. Or that my ghoat writer may have been derelict as well, attested by the fact that I had not even met him. You will see what a generous nature I have, sharing blame at *every* opportunity.

“Well, then, what have *you* done for education in this environment?” my interrogator asked somewhat rudely.

I could see that my critic needed to find some faults to corroborate his report and my theory of the necessity for liabilities contributing to the economy would be validated. But I must be diplomatic enough to give him some basis for complaint while treading carefully to secure the required check mark for approval on his form. I must admit that by now I felt even less decorative with these severe decisions required but decided to comply for who knows whether our continued existence in this magical place may hinge on such an issue.

“Oh, in that case, I would like to tell you about the educational principles we have considered and helped publicize for the very important residents of this island, the rabbits.”

“Rabbits,” he growled.

“Of course. We visited the rabbits recently and I must say that being officially introduced to the sophisticated underground system perfected by years of research and experience proved a revelation to me. They are the largest group of island residents and have developed a unique system of survival. We were told that the insatiable rabbit must maintain its reputation by a skillfully programmed curriculum. Our guide told us that they train their children in technical survival at a very early age. The courses specifically prepare them for environmental hazards, invasion manipulation and stress avoidance.”

“What are these courses?” the critic asked.

“Oh, pre-school consists of diversionary tactics as avoiding automobiles and their occupants as well as preliminary training in botanical specimens in the wild; then identifying and refining techniques in securing vegetation from domestic sources, for example, the rural garden, *and*, when advanced, selected urbanized locations.

“But,” the guide said . . .

But I continued. “the serious emphasis, however, is targeted toward the scholar. A select group is chosen annually—from those that have not only graduated with honors academically but proven their value by new innovative contributions to the culture. This group confers at regular intervals for the primary reason of conserving our society, our culture and, in fact, our existence. But we do this by studying the opposition, its techniques and goals, and then seek to circumvent them.”

“Do you mean there is intentional intrigue going on?” the critic growled.

“Of course. The rabbit must create environmental hazards to thwart the opposition’s goals. If a rabbit has attained his majority and exhibits any discretion and wisdom at all, he is invited to join various island committees. The three major ones are the Ecological Society, the Society for the Control and Management of Man and, for the woman, Population Explosion Techniques (now expanded to include male hares due to the ERA amendment. We do not discriminate). The opposition has infiltrated our pastures with warrens *above* the ground, therefore, we have less urban development allowances. We combat this by botanical piracy (that’s more of a mischief-making enterprise) but, seriously, by gaining publicity for marauding which is a direct result of our population expansion program. Although the latter tactic presents administrative difficulties, it is a deterrent to island immigrants. For in spite of our training, our traffic fatalities are high and this is nothing compared to deaths by the hunter. You can’t imagine how we were hunted, the narrator said. By day with guns and by night with flashlights to blind us. Being a vigilante was the most dangerous career available then. Of course, we had our heroes, but we learned how to incorporate the entire population into the underground movement. Our warrens were impervious until the ferrets came. I wish I could take you on the underground tour but after I see your size you are not qualified, he told me

apologetically. I nodded as my ego shrank. But strangely enough, he went on, our competitors passed a law recently requiring permission to hunt on these lands. It was a victory for us. Planning strategies is our major thrust—belonging to this group is the highest honor. I asked him if he belonged and, you will see he was highly qualified. He said he was chief liaison and publicity director.”

“So how did this doctrinal presentation end?” the critic probed.

“Oh, cordially. I asked him for tea some day,” I said.

“And . . . ?”

“He said the committee had been visiting us regularly for months—nightly.”



Occupational Therapy

We had noticed that Mary was constructing more posts and beams without requesting from us our Environmental Impact Statement. However, although the plan decreased the solar exposure, we generally approved because it also decreased the rigors of the east wind which climbed the nearby hill in winter and roared back down—into us. ‘Oly tested each beam which shuddered obligingly before settling down reluctantly to its new career: holding up other fragile posts and beams. We hoped for a tour.

We were in an intermission while we waited for the “new addition.” I had noticed being “ill” had its disadvantages and decided to concentrate again on vocabulary. I munched on a few new words that Bob had selected from the new hay bundles like “effable” (capable of being expressed). Yes, I could use that one. “How about ‘electroencephalogram’?” said Bob.

I examined it with my head but declined. “It’s so long,” I said. “I’m not sure I could digest it. Its tail would still be in my first stomach while its head was approaching the fourth.” But I ate other words, stuffing them in trying them out for size. “Ugh, I had to spit out several.”

“Iz, you *discarded* some,” Bob cried.

“Just part of electroencephalogram,” I said. “I tried it finally but that word is as long as an eel. I spit it out.”

“Iz, in a decorative position, you need to consider more ornate vocabulary.”

“Bob, are you going to make me into a Pygmalion? Ooooh, do I now start Greek? Then I would have to seriously digest that word, electroencephalogram!”

"Maybe we could start with 'spanakopita' – filo filled with spinach and feta cheese."

"Totally ineffable! I want it now."

And, at another conference, Mary quit her esteemed position reckoning we were now sufficiently adjusted to island life and she could contribute more to the Sheriff's Department by getting vehicle tickets. She would return to commuting. But this indicated a vacant position on our staff. She made out an application form.

Equal Employment Opportunity
EXEMPT POSITION

You have been invited to apply for the position of

SHEPHERD/ESS-

POSITION DESCRIPTION

Part-time employment for genus Capra, the trilogy of Isadore, Ole and N'y with maintenance duties consisting of analyzation of nutrition requirements and provision of same; studies on water resource development and supply, and psychological support services.

QUALIFICATIONS: a stable background *hah!*

Kindly indicate your interest by completing and returning the data below. This is a noncompetitive selection process. All applications will be rated by a review panel. Interviews will be scheduled at a later date for those applicants whose qualifications most closely correspond to those of the position requirements. Selection will be based on oral interviews of finalists and upon statements of reference.

I wish to apply for the above position:

Name *Bob Aquarian Thompson* ^{**} Salary Desired *6005*
Address *Between the Conifers & the water* ^{City} *Island Idyll*
State *Lonely* Zip *Some left* Telephone *please do*

References:

Mark 4:7, Genesis IV, XVII, Pg 17 ch 5,
Maie Mountain, Thompson Ranch, W.
Hartford, CA, my right elbow.

Return to Mary L. Doerflein.

Seattle, WA

I'd love to, but the fence is on strike

** not Anti-aquarian!*

** Aquarians are
the next thing to Capricorns.*

*him I
knew?
XXXXXX*

Bob got the job. Us!

Though not reassigned at the Zoo, Mary secured temporary slots for the City, one of which was to be for a boss who spent almost all his time in Washington, D.C. involved in transparency and later, the Board, the board being equally prestigious, but involved in teeter tottering between crises then nothing to do. It was the latter state of the teeter totter that was most satisfying. She could catch up on my dictation and link up with my mysterious ghoat writer.

And Bob had an occupational renaissance when . . .



What to his wondering eyes did appear was: Not this yacht which is what he really wanted, but a “rowboat” heading toward Friday Harbor with an offer for a three-month “work experience program (with a possible extension to seven months) writing brochures, pamphlets, and environmental impact statements. I’ll do both jobs,” he said.

And he was to send Mary bulletins, our progress reports, during the week, like this one:

“Puhleeesssszzzz don’t, don’t, don’t worry about Isadore. That is an order. She gets gobs of TLC. I was there today—twice and yesterday and talked to her and petted her and handfed her. She’s just fine. OK? “

A leaf tested my nose. Always susceptible to autumn, I shivered. Would winter again be harsh? I noted with pride, however, that my new coat for the season had arrived full and thick. I supposed it was all the alfalfa I was fed. I really didn’t like it that much but one week there was no choice. “It’s alfalfa or nothing, Isadore,” said Mary in her ‘It’s the weekend and I am your mistress voice.’ And I ate those green pellets which threaded in and out of my stomachs to make a stocky, rugged coat complete with what looked like a new pair of stockings that covered my knobby knees. This was good because lately I did not look good in photographs, particularly if there were a critic about.

And from Bob:

“I started work today and it is great to be doing this stuff again. It’s so much fun and some pressure, too. I’m thinking of eating some Gann hay to get more words and ideas.

And an important ceremony was to occur that autumn. We had been spending many of the nights outside admiring the moon which was growing. ‘It’s getting fatter,’ said ‘Oly apprehensively who had had very little opportunity to participate in night life under the house in Seattle.

“Oh, that’s what it usually does,” replied N’y who had much more experience in astronomy. “Don’t worry, it will get thin again.”

“Does it have a tape worm, too?” ‘Oly inquired. “Maybe we can get some extra pumpkin seeds for it.”

“No, it will look that way when it thins out in a week; it’s just that it uses so much light when it is fat that it has to rest to get more again,” replied N’y. We stayed in its light until the owls hooted far in the forest. “And those owls . . .” said N’y. “They are the Who’s Who of the wood.”

The next evening while I had a treat having found the trough unoccupied, Bob came and Mary called for N’y and ‘Oly. They had seldom been paged in such cryptic tones. I rushed out to be present. Just as surreptitious as the moon stood Bob, Mary and Carol (from civilization) to observe an ancient tradition sliding out from under the canopy of time: we were to celebrate the memory of the scapegoat ceremony, *Yom Kippur*, for . . . when would we ever have such main characters available again? Two goats and three sinners.

Bob read: “And, he shall take two goats and present them before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other lot for the scapegoat.” Bob hesitated. “But no goat is going to want to be the sacrifice goat,” he demurred.

“But that is the goat of honor—the one sacrificed for the sins, the mistakes, of the people,” said Mary; “‘Oly is the symbol of the forgiveness of God, the atonement. He’s ‘covering’ . . . for everyone.”

“And I guess I have enough sins for everyone,” said Bob bridging the centuries. “Let’s get covered.”

Bob took a white spike and a black one and threw them on the ground. “Oh,” he said, the white one is pointing toward N’y. He is the scapegoat, symbolic of sins being carried away. But ‘Oly then is the sacrifice goat.” And N’y trotted off to the wilderness (or was it the trough) while ‘Oly stood, quite subdued. “‘Oly,” Bob said, “you are the Lord’s goat—it’s a compliment.” ‘Oly straightened; felt his horns still attached and relaxed but not quite: his spinal cord tensed.

“It’s only symbolic,” said Mary with a pat on his cheek. ‘Oly did not allow anyone to get too close to his prize possession, his horns, but he stood quietly. The Lord’s goat should be cooperative, he told me later, well, at least, to a certain extent. And the ceremony was over. Everyone filed silently away.

I was astounded. It wasn’t that I didn’t know about this. These traditions get “footed down” from generation to generation. Seven of our most eminent ancestors had traveled on Noah’s ark, I had read from the Book, and lived to scamper out. These wisps of stories tantalize my credulity. I looked again in the book from the box. Credulity was required, I learned, to gain access to *the* God, my God. It’s called faith, the book said. What was

faith? Was it unexplained reason? Was it just trusting the record? I could see that it meant a jump into the unknown, unknown, at least, to me. But not to God. How far was the jump? I went back to my book.

October was growing on the calendar along with the moon. I heard rumors of the pumpkin seed cure. I was really amused. It seemed ideas for my health were endless. I would try almost anything by now just for the novelty. Carol personally brought me sunflower seeds to practice on. "I was hooked," I told Bob.

"Iz, your language!"

"Oh, I meant to say the sunflower seeds were inestimable. Now we try pumpkin seeds. And I'll get to try a new word for those!"

"That's an improvement. How did you hear the pumpkin seed story? By eavesdropping as usual?"

"Yes, I heard that at Mary's job, eight pumpkins had been ordered for eight board members of some entity which is to remain unnamed. They had been carved to resemble these board members and after the session, my mistress had excitedly asked for the seeds of her own contribution from four of them. Consent was unanimous and because energy conservation issues were paramount, an action was approved whereby she came home with a bag of seeds, not from four but from eight interiors. Her job description, she said, did not permit seed sorting (unfair labor practices, I assume, or requiring too much energy) so she could not say which seed belonged to which board member. Equal rights would apply.

But there was competition for the ceremony. Ten bales of Gann hay (and incalculable vocabulary vitamins) had arrived by truck for the winter and waited to be persuaded to the goatel. 'Oly and N'y had approved the delivery and spent the night near the driveway guarding the hay. It required a massive effort to push, tug and yank the bales into the goatel but we used them to remodel our little rooms again using hay as the walls. Soon we would need cell phones to communicate, I thought. We got garlic; we were petted and fed; the day was glorious but Mary almost forgot the pumpkin seeds which had waited patiently on the bar right in front of a rat which, fortunately, had not yet finished his evaluation of edibility (rats sometimes using up to four weeks for their investigations and at our goatel, noted for exotica, even eight would be possible and advisable).

I was served first for once. N'y and 'Oly now guarding the hay ran out, and knocked Mary down to get the seeds. What a prescription, I thought. I even forgot to check on the location of my supposed tape worm. I imagined though it was right *on* target. I also had forgotten to ask about the career prospects of the board members (or that of my own mistress: how does she stay in a job). But I already felt better. I could only say that four pumpkin heads were better than eight cabbage heads. And if Mary didn't stay afloat, it meant she would be unemployed and back here. A buffer zone. I was comforted

The next day was the boomerang of the politically infused pumpkin seeds and my ruminant nature did serve a double purpose. I swerved that afternoon in my cogitations to the subject of politics. The pumpkin seeds had come in a newspaper cone, the latter having made its way to our stable. Somehow the topics seemed familiar:

The Middle East (always a teeter totter)
Iran
Energy conservation
The environment, land use
The E U

Were the pumpkin seeds designated to solve these crises? It was a big agenda.

Bob to Mary: I spent the entire day being sick. I didn't go near Isadore so she won't catch it!

We would need a staff meeting with the vets to suggest diagnoses for Bob. I hoped there were sufficient other goats to appease the turbulence of our era, as long as we did not have to. Even 'Oly's symbolic stance might not be enough. I haven't really reformed my organizational processes to absorb this new glimpse into the past.

And the following week we had a staff meeting, the chief topic being our lack of staff. There would be more organizational rearrangement. We could not diagnose Bob's case because the symptoms gave notice they did not want to be handled in our imaginative hands and had politely left. But Bob would work a different shift —night! We continue our night life! I purred after I checked the organizational chart to confirm it.

“Last night was unusually warm. I went out about 10:00 p.m. and messed around with the goats. Isadore was very affectionate and I tried to play around with 'Oly but he was in a wild bull mood, and I had left my dagger at home. Izzy is a lot spryer in the cool of the evening. And there were a lot of other spry things around. The cattle over the hill were bawling something fierce; they should be fluent always eating Gann's hay. Four or five owls were holding forth; and a chorus I could not identify over on the other side of your road. It was a very social area. Izzy was looking around over her shoulder while I was feeding her. I hope they haven't been evicted.”

There had been more shots so I had added the shoulder technique for safety. Could we be evicted?

My advisers are very strict with me on the subject of energy and other types of conservation. I was told we must limit electricity and water. Since we had no electricity or running water, we cleared that obstacle. It did seem that energy was being expended: wood cut in the forest, carrying it, stacking it and water being hauled when ideally it was supposed to be conserved. I decided it was time for the pumpkin seeds to descend into my third stomach for further meditation.

Oh, a thought entered my abomasum but exited right away. I was exultant; I had perceived that energy conservation is primarily energy conversation.

Bob was reading my thoughts. How does he do that? “Iz,” he said, “I didn’t tell you earlier that words can be used very forcefully. They can jab—they can be just like thorns. You must use those very seldom—not until you’ve meditated enough for provocations to reach your third stomach, at least.”

“They’ve just arrived,” I answered. I didn’t want Bob to think I had endless stomachs to think about the world’s problems . . . or anger. I had enough anger to supply the world myself. I had frustrations waiting in line, some which had to be ejected because I needed to make room for new, ferocious angers clamoring to get in. Just look: ‘Oly is anger personified. And he needs to wash his nose.



And land use: our era was fraught with tangles over use of the land. But we were productive stewards, N’y a chief deforestation expert. Our special penchant for landscaping and pruning produced a neat, trimmed appearance (our commission, the sweet pink wild roses). And, yes, we occasionally extended our horticultural operations to nearby areas. And we did nibble at inviting buds that had planned to adorn their branches that spring.



The environment—that’s a safer subject, I thought. And impacts—they are forceful but not necessarily deadly. Except there’s that saint, Mt. Saint Helens—not very saintly, I thought. It’s simmering two hundred miles south of us.

So I’ve digressed. It’s just that my concept of land use and that of the experts diverges. The consultants informed me that the “experts” sat in a building and drew maps. They even frowned over what lines went where. Then others altered the lines and the rest frowned back. Mary tried to explain that the little ribbons that floated so benignly in the breeze meant we were not supposed to trespass beyond them. In theory, this was well and good, but she is the one who took us trespassing in the beginning and we were beguiling accomplices. I had learned the word “development.” The semantic possibilities of that word intrigued my 4th stomach. Our domain which comprised the ten acres (which we didn’t use much—we were conserving) and the neighbor’s eighty acres (which we delighted in) was about to move into one of those buildings for discussion.

And then we were insulted by the “cat,” a monster caterpillar which arrived without introduction and brought us back to our own land use concerns.

This was like no other “cat” I had ever met and though impressed with its size, claws and bass meow, I held my ground. It must not come near the trough that I realized. It had been fortunate that those floating ribbons were made of plastic or the cat may have trespassed. After all, we were its stewards. But the cat did not trespass; instead it clawed up gigantic pieces of our erstwhile swamp. One of our favorite elderberry trees and the quince was chewed up. And the debris and entrails of the floral world were scattered. We ate them during the evening shifts while the animal slept during the night.

The new cat kept meowing. It never purred but, even so, became our new interest and we were less fearful when it passed by the goatel and our house. It made holes in the terrain with a screeching, drilling sound that would terrify any rock. Bob often told us we lived in Teutonic splendor; we thought we were living in Revelation. His report:

“I have returned from the Black Forest and the gotts were (is that taking the gross gott’s name in vain?) Or is it a compliment? But the gotts were wont to gamble. Even Izzy opined: I think I feel like gambling. She’s going to open with a pair of Jacks, she said.

“But if we gamble, she will win so I quickly explained that she isn’t gambling; she’s gambling. With that she said she then wanted to become a member of the *literati*. Here I thought she was a fallen goat but instead she is reading law.

“And she wants to know if you’ve gotten her an agent yet and when is her first autograph party. Why do you think she got a manicure? And I thought you would have the first galley proofs by now. Is it because you are sneaking your philosophy into her autobiography (a *very* unethical practice)? It would mean she will have to cogitate more and gamble, oops, gambol less.”

Then strangely enough . . . in three months . . . our environment came back, injured but healing. And we had our *own* pond. The owls hooted appreciatively. Birds visited.

Bob to Mary: “My rowboat got a new oar. I got my brochure back, slightly mutilated, and now have to rewrite it, get it ready for printing, and that’s it. Dave wants me to do one for the Alcohol Center. ‘Alcoholism is a growing field! he said.’ And I can say I’m well qualified; I’ve been in the field about 35 years.”

The time of patrol and cogitation had been exhausting. I must conserve my own energy. I wonder if my tape worm is hungry. If not, I am. And Bob:

I decided to go again at night to “gambol” with the goats. Yesterday they did not even venture out of the goatel. Anyway, rest easy. they will be well visited.

I didn’t tell anyone we had already gambled (oops, I mean gamboled).



Winter Visits

Our second. The chill of lonesomeness permeated my alfalfa coat, my rubbery skin and my heart. The northeast wind intensified the chill. A little bit of defense was provided with the completion of the new “wing” and the wind had to take detours. The chill, the boredom, the fermented hope. We hardly chewed anything; winter chewed us. I would have time now to thaw some words out but they are frozen and stark. I had even spent so much time looking up a word in the dictionary my thought froze.

We still had our weekly walks as Mary braved winter to drive from Seattle, hack out the ice on the new trusting pond and thaw our souls. That weekend the stars, the houselights of heaven, turned themselves on. We could not yet ice skate but we had developed a kind of pavanne—a motionless dance in which we three stood under the trees—silent. In the moonlight we looked eerie—a trio of glimmering white statues. We could stand like pharonic dancers for half an hour while Mary skated to stay warm.

We had few diversions that winter but one was to create an artistic termite palace. ‘Oly and I chipped two old stumps nearby into a castle with sheer, spiked cliffs. It looked like a fortress, with its rutted, chipped cascading interior. Strips of bark were also a delicacy and the fir tree boughs a delight, especially the Christmas trees, which stripped of their finery, were now as ragged as we. “But,” said Mary, “the insects don’t even need the stumps; they have the entire house to bite.”

“But they told me, the house lumber has inferior quality,” I said to her.

It was the rat in residence that received a great deal of attention. Because a rat psychologist was unavailable, the harsher methods of eviction were discussed, for example: what would be his defense in court (or courtyard) juxtaposed by attempts to persuade him to leave voluntarily. I did not tell my mistress that there was more than one rat. We did our part. ‘Oly made nightly raids on the competing interlopers to catch them with his horns. But it seemed that the ceiling or walls were always in the way of his occipital bone. And I could smell the poison being put out for their exclusive consumption. N’y wanted to eat it; he had even put his exploratory equipment, his mouth in the dish when Mary yanked him back up and opened his mouth to get it out. ‘Oly consoled himself by developing a special penchant for more glue he found in the new construction. Jung being unavailable, Bob did the research:

“I talked to the County Sanitationer regarding how the rats had ignored all goodies, etc. He said again they would not even touch anything new in the environment for up to four weeks.”

And we walked. Although rising was a strenuous effort, once I ascended I could amble out to face whatever the weather offered which was usually a cold bath. I looked about hoping to see Noah's ark in the area. Only the onset of our food rations was heralded with excitement. Bob came one day and with him, a visit from the critic (all bundled up in scarves and furred coat). Not our skins, I made sure.

"Isadore," the critic said, "your style is bumpy and jerky. There's no plot; at least, we cannot find it."

Should I say the plot hadn't been manufactured yet. Didn't destiny decide the plot? I was quite silent. It seems I had put my foot in it again—and not my best pedicured one. Perhaps . . . perhaps . . . perhaps . . . even my motivation was frozen solid.

My experiments with hypochondria were going well but I came out of it quickly when I heard Mary say "Carol, would you give me the sunflower seeds and I will see if I can persuade Isadore to come out?" Carol? Sunflower seeds? Three magic words. Both 'Oly and N'y left the stable to assess the situation. I found myself also advancing outside, the sunflower seeds always just ahead in Mary's hand. Ach, too late I realized, I had been bribed.



There were more outside than sunflower seeds. There were tailors, a party of eight. I felt a soft, white cloth being pulled over my legs and over my shoulder. "Scissors, scalpel" was shouted. "The neck is too narrow."



They widened the shoulder and I stepped into a new experience, four new legs, and a new coat.

"It's a new skin," I said elatedly when I had time to examine my new wardrobe. And why not? These humans wear a new skin every day. "Isadore," said Bob. "You will need this extra coat for the winter. And I won't be able to visit as much. I have a new essay to write."

"Oh, what is the title?" I asked.

"The merits of obscurity," he answered. Therefore, I must be go and be obscure to find out what merits it has."

Then we will be obscure also. But only until Spring. Then I'll return to landscaping with N'y and 'Oly. But how will the buds be able to find the right trees again? Especially since we ate them off last year?

A few visitors came by: one, the grammarian. He picked up my assortment of words which had decreased, I had to admit. He looked at them quizzically. "You've tried," he said commiseratively. "And you have a respectable metaphor here and there, although some are mixed—mixed up. But the similes are improving. I see though that you have depleted your supply of diacritical marks and punctuation. How can you make a properly confusing sentence without them?

"Oh, I do have a can of worms, I mean, commas. But, Sir, they are so inert. I have my own, very strong and resilient worms that wiggle beautifully available from my reticulum, but Bob and Mary will not let me use those. Look." I hastily constructed a sentence for him using my own worms so he could see how superior, how animated they were compared to those in the can.

The grammarian dejectedly picked up his briefcase. "Your clients won't want to see a live worm wiggling in milk. Other than that it's only the clichés that are still stuck."

"Are those the words that come out glued together?" I cried. I couldn't do a thing about them."

"Neither can I. Sorry, I have to leave."

And next was the political advisor: "Good day, I am polling for our candidate. May I ask for your support? And he pulled out an immense roll of red tape which he tried to attach to my rumen but which became entangled. Classed as 'hardware,' my reticulum was able to destroy it. Does this mean that as the economy improves it gets worse?" I asked. "Are we to have an economic implosion?"

"What about 'Oly and N'y? Do they deal in something besides oxymorons?" he asked.

I called for them and the advisor explained his mission: "I am here hoping to secure your cooperation in the arms race."

"Oh," said 'Oly, flexing his horns, "we don't have arms. Is that a race to see who can destroy first? Sadly, I am a monarch and do not vote. My oligarchy decides policy."

N'y said: "Sir, I am an ennyarchist and . . ."

"My compliments for a nice day," said the politician as he hurriedly left waving his own arms.

Another was the local meteorologist: "Isadore, I am the local meteorologist and I find in my records that we do not have any records on the weather in this pocket of the island."

“We have it,” I said. “generally in liquid form. I hear ours is comparatively mild compared to the Arctic or Alpine patterns. “But the winds rehearse here before they become hurricanes somewhere else.” I showed him a heavy fir bough wrenched from a nearby tree for emphasis. “And you can see that I have an extra winter coat. And that’s not all,” I added, “even though winter spent most of its time in the east, it did not want to leave us out and came back here and lashed its tail.”

“Oh, I heard about that,” he said. “I even heard about your eight legs.”

Because Bob was entangled in obscurity, we had been able to hire Mr. Gann’s staff: his Master of the Horse and three sons. And from the hill nearby, I heard the rustle and clip clop of other hooves: one horse, three ponies, and the three kids to go with them, 24 legs altogether. Impressive. Almost the four horses of the apocalypse. If I added my eight legs, it was 32; with N’y and ‘Oly: 40. We had an army! We all assembled to meet our retinue.

Only one more visitor came that winter: an encrusted gentleman carrying a sign that read “Theological implications.” Ach, this required careful consideration and I sat up with attention. I took a wad of hay on which to chew and offered it generously to him but he declined.

“Isadore,” he mused as he sat down in the hay beside me, “your species represents an enviable position. In ancient times, the blood of bulls, of sheep and goats was considered a substitute to offer God for everyone’s mistakes. But now the *Capra* species has changed its status. I mean it *seems* to have an *unenviable* stance. And then he reached over and took a piece of my hay.

“Wait,” I said, that was the last straw.”

“Oh,” he said, “excuse me. But I have a new perspective to offer on this subject. Are you interested?”

“Yes,” I said. “Why are we in an *unenviable* position? We give more milk than the sheep and our milk is richer and easier to digest. We have all the necessary proteins, oils, milk sugars and complex carbohydrates necessary for sustenance of any mammal. And as for immunological factors, it’s the bacteria that preserve nutrients, all this with a reduced pH. Besides Bob gives me a “verbal” supplement. When he milks, my milk comes out in alphabet soup!”

“And we don’t pull the wool over anyone’s eyes.”

“But it seems God chooses the sheep to sit on his right hand and the goats on the left.”

“Where does it say that?”

“In Matthew 25:33. It says ‘And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left’.”

“Ah,” I yes,” I said. “Matthew 25. “Do you think this implies that goats are in a second position?”

‘Oly and N’y were lounging nearby and ‘Oly heard the word “second.”

“Ma,” he interjected. “I’m not second to anyone.”

“Of course not, son. Sir, apologies, please continue.”

“To answer your question,” the theologian said, “it gets worse. Later, God, your specially chosen God says the goats, the ones on his left shall depart unto everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”

“But I have that same book from the box without a top and the sheep and goats are only a metaphor.”

“What do you mean, metaphor?”

“Our literary critics want us to put a few similes and metaphors in our book and God has a few in his book, too. It does not mean the sheep or goats are the subject, it’s the nations he collected to judge in Verse 31. “When the Son of Man shall come in all his glory, and all the holy angels with him . . . (Verse 32): before him shall be gathered all *nations*. Sir, it’s the *nations* that will get divided between the good and bad. The sheep and goats only are the metaphors for that event. I think God chose the goats to be on the left because he knew we are more gracious than sheep. You forgot to consult the context, Sir.”

“Oh,” said ‘Oly and relaxed against a post.

The theologian left, his notes flapping, one of which N’y caught as he walked by and ate.

When N’y returned, he said, “Isadore, I have never been invited to join the fraternity.”

“Do you mean, *Alpha and Omega*,” I asked hopefully. We didn’t want to ask you; we wanted you to want to.”

“Yes,” he said. “I had heard before about goats being on the left side, thrashing about in hell, and didn’t think it was fair at all of God, but you just explained what that section really said, and I want to join God now, especially when Jesus, *the* lamb was sacrificed for me, think of it, a lamb, god sacrificed for a goat.

“Bob told me I did not need to be perfect; I’ll never be. Jesus is the only way we will ever claim perfection because *he* is; he’s done all the work. We just accept it.”

I was amazed. N'y hardly ever talked; now he was giving a sermon.

“Oh, N'y,” I said. “God heard you.”

“I want to be heard, too,” blurted “Oly.



The Birthday Party

Winter did not take off its coat until April. In deference to our shy and hesitant guest of Spring, we shed our coats about the same time, our threads decorating the ground with their white, hair like spikes. I was almost afraid to take off my new coat—I looked fatter, richer with it—I would be thin again.

“No,” said Bob just back from obscurity, “‘Oly and N'y have grown so much that you just look smaller. It's really just an optical illusion that you're thin.”

“What was obscurity like?” I asked. “Did it have some merits?”

“That's how I became adept at ‘illusions’,” Bob smiled. “And better rationalizations. And what better place could there be to develop character, or the character assassinations that you like Izzy. But now I have to do research on the merits of mediocrity!”

“Bob, do you have to leave? But if you could you take ‘Oly's temper with you, I could bear it.”

These nebulous theories intrigued me and I regained my stamina soon enough to help eat the rhododendrons. And meditate on a word that had two asses, sass, sin and nations in it—very useful for international political discussions

Since during the winter we hadn't actually eaten the neighbors' rhododendrons, just nibbled, our mistress thought we had developed highly selective taste and had deleted the rhododendrons from her endangered list. Highly optimistic, she planted two rhododendrons, a box of forget me knots, lilies of the valley and bluebells near the front door. She waited for our approval. We thoroughly investigated them. I snipped off the rhododendron petals, didn't forget the Forget me Knots and ignored the lilies. N'y and ‘Oly only smelled and flirted with the flowers except for the second rhododendron which they carefully pruned. I didn't say that the reason I ate the rhododendron was that I thought it might be a chemotherapy treatment and might poison any cancerous cells I could have (even though I had been undiagnosed as yet). I realized that such a medicinal concept was much too profound for her and, then, it was in only the experimental stage. I was my most perverse. Mary who petted me put her finger in my mouth thinking I was going to kiss it. I bit instead. Well, I thought she was going to take my one tooth away.

Was the snake visiting us? N'y also felt called to harass: he had plucked Bob's sleeve before he left for mediocrity with his teeth (only his arm was underneath), booted the lounge, tried the door and, in short, we were all naughty. 'Oly's temper refused to go anywhere until it heard about the volcano and left to encourage it. Such a tempest with Bob leaving. And the snake still unknown.

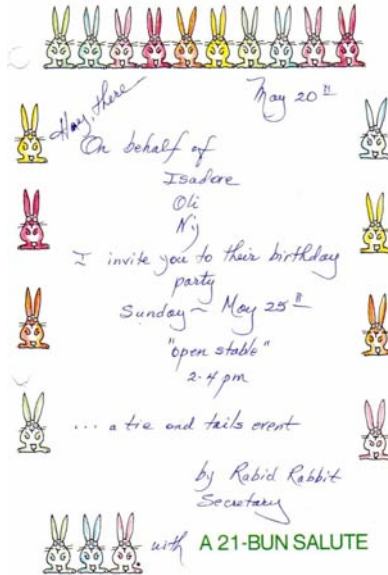
Two weeks later, the volcano also infected by the seasonal mood did lose its temper – but we were prepared for once. We were all equipped with masks but 'Oly demurred: it prevented him from uninhibited access to the trough. And my worms protested as well; they were getting suffocated. Only N'y wore his mask long enough to be a role model.



And two weeks later our climatic equilibrium and our own was restored. We had carved out our dirt baths with our hooves; each of us had his/he own concave dirt crater dimpled with fresh volcanic ash. We luxuriated in the hollow and the flies left. My udder informed me it was too lazy to manufacture milk and was retiring permanently. I was both relieved and saddened: relieved because nothing useful was expected from me and I would be able to concentrate on being a piece of décor but saddened because I would not be in demand. Does this mean I will be obscure? I must consult Bob. Or something even worse? The new unknown: mediocrity?

Bales of new Gann hay (filled with new, experimental words) arrived; our goatel was swept, my solar complex tended and our winter windbreaker discarded. The manger was cleaned and, most importantly, refilled; in short, we had attention. Only 'Oly butted into every situation, but what can one expect of a rising executive?

And we were to have a birthday party. I was terribly excited. The invitation came:



Everyone who knew us and some who did not, were invited. More attention was lavished on us. I was given a gift certificate in advance for a shampoo by Carol. My beard was going to be laundered with goat's milk soap. "Just think of what all these modern goats are doing," Mary said: shampoo, milk, hair twisted into Persian carpets . . ."

Oh, I thought, I can't be bothered; after all, it isn't only my udder that has retired. I am. But I was intrigued by the possibility of having my beard washed—maybe I would be invited to court – oh, oh, Bob heard that thought, he wrote again: "Izzy, I am quite certain you might be invited to court but it would be the San Juan County Court." Well, either one, precise grooming would be required, I thought. What about my tail? My hair is sadly stained from lying in the goatel. And my knees are dirty. I will ask for a total bath, I decided. I haven't had one for a year and a half when Carol buffed me and I shone — more, I think, from the attention than the scrubbing. I applied for every cosmetic offered.



One guest wanted to bring castor oil for me. We gracefully declined. We supplied our own tails and Mary made ties; otherwise, she said, she would have to tie our beards into bows. N'y gave rides. We cavorted.

These were our gifts:

Mock orange
Hugs
Garlands
Hay
Chicken feed
Rocking horse



Ginger

Castor oil (attempted)
Tapestry
Garlic

Judi
Bob
Katie
The Ganns

Dr. Henley
Dr. Spencer
Myra Jo
Carol, Terry and Ginger
Peter and Karen

'Oly had wanted to be in charge of the refreshments but it was decided he would instead be assigned as host. And these were our goodies: Cake and punch – but we had to offer them first to the guests who decimated our share. Still, we had Katie's garlands and mock orange for ourselves. It was a marvelous party.

And, of course, there is always the hangover. The next day I could hardly get up at all. I lay on my plush mattress and ate my favorite timothy while listening to the strategy of the day being planned.

Mary – *sotto voce*: "Carol, could you entice 'Oly and N'y out of the stable. Then I could give Isadore her garlic and corn."

I could hear Carol's dulcet tones call "'Oly – N'y." Since 'Oly still had a supply of curiosity, he ambled out. N'y was already there but with his prescient ears cocked for counterstrategy. I could hear Mary tiptoe out the back, and she came crawling in with luscious garlic cloves and another bowl of corn. I knew I had to gouge myself quickly but even the small nuzzling crackle of corn reached N'y's ears and I soon found his nose in my plate. Oh, well, I got there first.

I felt better. True, my nose still ran (but not far enough away) and I had emitted my most resonant cough during the night. Upstairs I had heard Mary coughing in reply but she lacked the quality of my racking basso *profundo*. I believe I had perfected the type of cough that would gain attention anywhere.

And our big news was that Bob had also had to visit his vet to pose for pictures or, rather, his ulcers were to pose. He had to delay his essay on mediocrity. This was serious.

The following morning I shed my apathy and room service status. I got up, walked and ate at the common table. This was fortunate since the strategizing techniques to feed me were running out of supply, both in potency and innovation. A new technique would last only three times at the most, sometimes only two since both ‘Oly and N’y were adept students at detection of evasive measures.

On examination of our budget, I saw that the party had consumed almost all of our resources. I lazily picked up Mary’s latest bag of contributions to my vocabulary and was shocked to see such dingy and shopworn samples.

Accounts Deceivable

8:00 a.m.

5:00 p.m.

Pills

Bills

“Iz,” she said, your gas bill is \$60 a month.”

“But I don’t even drive,” I remonstrated and predicted another revenue analysis session soon.

Then I received a verbal memo from my budget analyst we needed to reform. What are we to do? I pull out my emergency list for ideas. Recycle. Of course. Maybe I could even wash former words, dry them off and use them again.

The list showed:

In-house energy management plan

Executive planning memorandum

Prioritization

Interruptible rate study

Ah . . .

Deferred compensation

Deferred maintenance

Couldn’t I use some of these, I thought. “Bob,” I coughed when he arrived for a short visit. “Could we talk?”

“Iz, of course. Are you worried that I’ve been gone so long?”

“Yes. And you are sick. You let me be sick all the time but you see I was just about to do my comprehensive review of services and rate study. And then there are the audit strategy and traffic bill impacts to consider. And I hoped to do the forecast of resources

soon. We've done so well in community liaison. And we haven't used the deferred compensation and maintenance services yet. Is there a way I could implement those? Would that make you feel better?"

"Iz, maybe you could get Mary to implement her VISA cards again to ease the crisis."

"What are those?"

"Well, that's how your stable and her house were built. It's a house of cards, VISA cards.

"I'd like one," I said. How does it work? Because I think Mary "implemented" hers too well."

"You put them in a slot in town and money comes out. Of course, there are some disadvantages. Then you have to work and pay the money back. "

"But my udder has retired. I can't really work and 'Oly and N'y aren't qualified."

"I know," Bob laughed, "but don't worry, things will work out."

"You mean things will work and I won't have to?"

"Kind of; in fact, they already have. I'll be back soon. Meanwhile, you have the four horsemen!

"Oh, they are wonderful; it's just I was so afraid you were never coming back. Could your vet give you one of those orange pills?"

"Ugh, I would spit it out—I mean discard it."

That weekend, Mary arrived with soothing words that she took out of my weekly bag to preview, and then gave to me for deliberation and future use. "Iz," she said, "you don't have to worry. The board members were not insulted when I turned them into pumpkin heads. I am going to get a salary raise soon; then we'll be fine. They are just happy that I show up at work." I regained enough optimism to rise from my preferred reclining spot number one to sink down again in preferred spot number two. I could see the new words punching each other inside the bag.

"But, Izzy, first I have something really special: a diagnosis for you."

"Oh, what is it?" I cried and produced my hoarest cough.

"Lung thread worms."

"What?" I cried. But everyone thought I had tuberculosis, cancer, arthritis, or rheumatism. I think I would rather have a diagnosis with many syllables."

“Izzy, you can still have those also, except I don’t want you to have TB or cancer.”

“But I want something with a distinctive name. Three threadbare words were not enough to describe my luxurious cough. “Do I have a better prescription?” I asked hopefully thinking it could be developed into something more sophisticated.

“What do you mean by ‘better’? It was garlic.”

“Garlic,” I cried again, “That’s only two syllables.”

“Maybe I could look in the medical dictionary and stretch it out into Greek or Latin,” said Mary laughing, knowing my sophisticated tastes. “But look at the words I brought. She opened the bag and out tumbled the words still arguing with each other:

Kaleidoscopic behavior
Occipital
Cachexia
Cabalistic

“They will be wonderful when I find out how to spell them. I’ll put them into my rumen in my cachexic frame.” I promised. “And I think ‘Oly already uses ‘occipital’ to see if the goatel is at the right height. But Mary, Bob had to go to Seattle to see his vet—maybe he can get one of those orange pills. Maybe that’s what the words were fighting about: his diagnosis!” I hoped he could get a long involved one that we can discuss and dissect.

I felt a twinge in my stomach. I think my lung thread worms are hungry. I went to the trough but ate selectively, omitting the medicinal “treats.”

The following weekend a seminar on tactics to ameliorate an anti-climax was scheduled. I was reduced to an exclamation in German “Ach.” That word was not in my official bag but I thought I could get it indexed. It’s so useful.

We spent a dejected morning – three glistening lumps in our dust bowls. Our trough had additives but not what we wanted. Our supplier could not explain the sudden add-on: sand.

“Isadore, I think it’s the volcano. It must have had another temper tantrum,” said Mary. And ‘Oly only has his party hats available.

“In the brochure the volcano sent out, it says that animals should have extra dry and clean food available in case of an eruption.”

“Then why don’t I?”



“Because the other animals got there first. Many didn’t get there at all. They died.”

I couldn’t respond gracefully because I had a feeling that Mary might open the previous bag of words on “Accounts Deceivable” and this was one set I wanted to avoid. “Ach,” I coughed.

“Grain is really like a dessert,” she soothed.

“Then I want my just desserts and why do we have to worry about a volcano 200 miles away,” I whimpered.

“Isadore, I think I have spoiled you. As for volcanoes, they get around. They cough, too; they fume and spout ash; the wind allows them to be ubiquitous. And besides, you have your own local volcano which could cough, Mt. Baker and you need to be trained in how to respond. In fact, remember, you live on a volcanic spur.”

I lifted each foot. The rocks even felt warm. Was there a volcano simmering under me? The seminar was concluded with the usual results, nothing, and I went and sat in my own foot made crater. Problems. An anti-climax, a volcano and little grain. I would have to go foraging for my own food. In all due respect to the volcano, I had my next meal to consider. But luckily because of our indolent summer, the blackberry vines had had time to crawl, almost in the door.

We went “out” for dinner. The menu was more blackberry vines *du jour*, and fox glove *au rigeur*. My mood was eased by the elegance of dining in French. ‘Oly, in a burst of culinary generosity ate one succulent thistle. Looking up I saw a crawling centipede in the sky. Actually it was pushed by the winds. Behind it reared – it was Pegasus – but this Pegasus had one foot lifted and the face of a goat with an affluent beard. Was affluence to return to us?

The “affluence” was a note from Bob.

“Praise God! The way I feel must be what Jesus meant when he said, ‘take no thought . . . be careful for nothing . . . etc. Perfect peace, equanimity and living in the present joyfully (which is more complex than it seems) . . . The joy of living in the reality of the present *includes* the joys of awareness of future hope and past bliss. Now, on to more or less heady matters:”

What was happening in Seattle? What are “heady matters”? Where is mediocrity? What is perfect peace when you are at the vets? Or, worse, when the vet is here?

And though we had no clean grain, I heard the rustle of dry hay, like the swish of taffeta, being pushed about in the goatel by Mary. My attitude added a ruffle to its skirt. The crises had passed. The only problem left was that I wanted to continue being “spoiled.” I was addicted.



The Fair

A big event was to happen. Two events. ‘Oly was going to the fair and N’y was going to launch his public political career. That lifted us right out of our concave dirt bathtubs.

Mary read from the bulletin bleating: “All authorized animals and pets that are allowed on the San Juan County Fairgrounds must remain in their own active assigned area and shall not be allowed to move about on the Fairgrounds, even on leash. In any event, there shall be no animals, pets, allowed in any *concession stand* area of the grounds.”

“‘Oly, that means you cannot buy anything at the salad bar. ‘Oly, did you hear what I read?”

“Yeah, it said animals are not allowed in any *concession* stand area. Or the salad bar. What about other bars?”

“You may go to the pedicure bar. ‘Oly, you won’t like everything but you *will* be admired and you will get . . . “

“Admired?”

“Yes, you might be the best goat there; if not the best, at least the biggest.”

“Does that mean I can start now—to eat more?”

“‘Oly, you don’t need to eat anything more.”

“Well, if I can be first in line.” I will consider it.

“I should have had lessons in etiquette for you, ‘Oly, but it might be too late. I know you had an erratic childhood and did not get a chance to be educated by Emily Post but”

“I don’t like protocol,” he finished. “See, Mary, I am polite; I finished your sentence for you.”

“But sometimes it is very useful. Now N’y . . . “

“Don’t bring N’y up—just because he *is* polite. Besides what will he be doing? Will he be eating, too? And what about my Ma?

“Isadore will manage home base. And N’y is going to be in the parade.”

“But I want to be in the parade, too.”

“‘Oly, in the parade you don’t get any concessions and you have to work—hard.”

“Oh, N’y can have it.”

“Good. We’ll start preparations soon.”

Mary showed me the letter she wrote and I approved. It would be a welcome diversion to our agendas. What if ‘Oly won a ribbon?

Mary’s dressed in a better attitude and began grooming preparations for the fair which were juxtaposed firmly against ‘Oly’s opposition tactics. Because he would not allow brushing, she swept him with the kitchen broom. ‘Oly countered by plunging into his own dust bowl. ‘Oly’s vet who had been requested to come for the pedicure and who had reluctantly agreed had not appeared. ‘Oly’s formal tie, brush and water pail lay pathetically on the ledge. As did the “heavy matters.”

But the nadir of negativity had been reached. Later that afternoon, Terry arrived in a truck and the latest subterfuge strategy began. Grain was put in the truck and the inquisitive ‘Oly found himself trapped with a noose about his horns. Such an insult cowed him into submission. With a bleat, he tugged against the rope of reality and found himself a prisoner. A brief reprieve due to the late arrival of Dr. Spencer gave him and me hope. It took Terry, a friend, and Mary to hold my rebellious progeny to get his nails clipped. Mary took the opportunity to use the brush and put on his bow tie. ‘Oly was off to the fair.

On arrival it was seen that he was the Goliath of goats and a large pen usually given to a flock of sheep was hastily authorized for his exclusive use. I wondered if the word “exclusive” was a euphemism, but at any rate he was handled with extreme diplomacy. Provisions were carefully laid out: fresh hay, grain and fresh, clean water in a clean pail, some twigs of fir and a beautifully lettered sign that read: “The’Oly Goat.” This interspersed with fir boughs on the lentil completed the pacifiers for his stay. ‘Oly, quite perplexed stood in the middle of his stall. His neighbors, sheep, gawked in formation. Doing obeisance? I wondered? The swish and swirl of the fair began but ‘Oly found his one constancy: his grain, now being ogled by the cheviots. He sat down in the middle of the stall, pail at hand or, rather, foot.

I, at home with N’y who was not scheduled for the parade until Saturday, waited anxiously. The fact that ‘Oly was going to be judged was suddenly an unraveling thought. Mary’s later account was excited. “Isadore, the sheep took most of the time. But I could not leave in case the goats were announced suddenly. The judging was three hours late and then they took the other goats first.”

“What? ‘Oly was not first? Was this a case for discrimination?”

“Oh, fortunately, he did not notice; there were so many other goats to look at. There was a Sa’anen like you,” said Mary, very smug and discrete but she did not have your queenly neck. And had not started French lessons yet. And there were Angoras, African pygmies, Alpines and Toggenburgs, and Nubians but ‘Oly *was* the biggest.

“Oh, I didn’t know we had such a cosmopolitan array of goathood on the island” I gasped. “Where do they live? We could visit them.”

“I will ask ‘Oly to get their addresses,” she temporized. But by the time the judge came to ‘Oly’s stall, he was exhausted. He had counted sheep all morning and was sleepy.

“How old is this goat?” he asked.

“Two and a half years old,” Mary had answered (quavering because you know I don’t have a birth certificate, she told me later).”The judge looked at his teeth which I saw with chagrin, had not been brushed.”

“He is at least five,” said the judge. “How else do you explain these large teeth?”

I was silent. Of course, I could, but I only nodded agreeably.

Then the judge looked at ‘Oly’s contours, his hair, his horns. “Isadore, I forgot his knees; they were dirty.” It was my turn to nod knowingly.

“What are you going to give him?” asked the handler.

“Give him a Blue,” said the judge.

I was dazzled.

“Of course,” said Mary, they used the Danish system.”

“What system is that?” I queried. Another system to absorb, I thought.

“Most of the other goats got Blues, too,” said Mary.

This fact failed to deter me from being proud. My son had received a Blue.

But the next day was to be a greater test. The Danish system was out and another judge was in. Further, a new set of goats arrived—polished, urbane and bemused. Suspense set in among the occupants of the pens.

The judging schedule was almost on time. Various classes were announced and the judging began again. ‘Oly was fascinated by the metropolitan visages parading around the ring and stood patiently, not even realizing he was on leash. The kids entered for

‘Miss Goat of America’ were charming, my mistress said, but they were all so small. Were they potential delegates to the freezer? I wondered. And, one goat, said Mary, chewed his blue ribbon up.

“Ah, a true representative of our species,” I laughed.

“Then there was a small ruckus in the ring,” Mary said and the judge announced: “Anyone who cannot control his animal should not be in the ring.”

A neighbor turned to Mary and said, “Then, for certain, ‘Oly will receive a blue ribbon for controlling *you*!” Mary said she laughed but ‘Oly must have objected to this insult for he ignored his usual battle options and continued quietly standing.

When ‘Oly’s class, “wethers” was announced, there was only one competitor, a kid named “Max.” Mary said she took ‘Oly gingerly around the circle wondering when the fight would begin. Max wobbled in as well—a kid only six months old. It was only near the fence that ‘Oly could be polite no longer. He began to buck. Mary said she was frantic and held the noose on his horns and clung to the authoritative role (a role she knew nothing about, I thought) but the tightened noose must have reminded ‘Oly of something ominous (maybe a real noose) because he subsided. And the judge took the microphone.

“If I must choose between these two goats, I must take the larger,” boomed the judge. “This goat, this ‘Oly, I must say has never missed a meal.”

“Isadore,” said Mary, “he got a second Blue. “I took him back to his stall, filled all the buckets, and waited to see if he had admirers. Isadore, he was a social hero. One person went by, stopped, looked and said ‘Magnificent!’”

“And that’s not all. Before I came home for the night I went to refurbish his buckets and when I returned, there was a purple ribbon there—he’s a champion!” This means he could go to the Western Washington state fair!

“Will he get to go?” I ask hesitantly, thinking the Budget State might object.

“I don’t think so, Izzy. This way we can pretend he might have won. We will just have to imagine the journey. Sometimes that’s easier. But we’ll miss the scones.”

I would have been in tears had I known how to cry. But I didn’t need to imagine the purple ribbon. It was real. I now only needed to imagine the scones.

“So now . . . ?” (But how could there be anything more than this? I thought.)

“‘Oly stays on display until Sunday. It’s N’y’s turn.”



The Parade

If only Bob would return, I thought plaintively the next morning. Here again was my mistress, Mary, all dressed up, a place to go and no pumpkin seed coach or prince available. Again, I heard from my siphoning system of sucking conversations from the upper floor to the stable that there was to be the *carriage* involved as well. This word had not appeared in any of my bags. I wish Mary would put more technical words in my inventory. In early spring, there had been a conversation about wheels, axles, nuts and bolts, perfect fodder for my reticulum. And in May the carriage had arrived. It was a fetching sight, blue, and it looked like a goose. “No, it really looks like a swan,” said Mary diplomatically. “A goose,” I said.

It was carried into the house thus creating a carriage house. A nebulous doubt emerged in my mind about the logicity of my owner. Yet Bob had said words conveyed anything so that if they conveyed the assumption that we now had a carriage house, I must believe it. “An illusion,” Bob would have said.

And there were other idiosyncrasies. How did my mistress get involved in politics so easily? I supposed it was that democracy was a complicated arena. An anarchy (an N’y) would have simplified matters.

“Isadore,” said Mary sighing, “I’ve bitten off more than I can chew and I don’t have four stomachs to help.” (Something that would never happen to us, I sympathized.) “I offered to help a candidate with his campaign and I thought how wonderful if N’y would be the parade goat and I would hand out leaflets for him. They would say ‘Take Washington state off a political dilemma with a unicorn jabbing, well, jabbing a sketch of ‘Oly posing as the dilemma. San Juan County is within the State of Washington, his jurisdiction.’ (I could not comment but I must imbibe that word “jurisdiction” for my future career in politics). “But now,” Mary bleated, “I have no way to get to town with the carriage or with N’y.”

N’y looked scrupulously clean, buffed and costumed from an earlier session that morning with Mary.

“Chauffeurs are endangered species in this area,” I said, “particularly ones to carry both a carriage and a goat.”

“Yes,” sighed Mary. “If only . . . But Isadore, Bob is tussling with ‘heady matters’.”

“Yes,” I said and just then my ears (and hers) detected the whirl of wheels. It was one of those remarkable rescues. Katie! Katie was a phenomenon, a visionary, this day having

left Seattle at 4:00 am to save the situation. “Put N’y in the back seat,” she ordered; “put the carriage in the trunk.” Mary, with a handful of oats and raisins beguiled the ever innocent N’y to crunch himself in the back seat and the carriage was lifted into the trunk. I had just witnessed the goddess of activity in motion.

Mary told me the story afterwards. Katie took N’y and his carriage to the parade staging area in Friday Harbor, arriving only a few minutes before the parade was to begin. A hasty assemblage of town residents pondered over how to convert N’y from a goat to a unicorn. Using evolution was not recommended. It took much too long. Intelligent design was suggested. Of course, said one resident.

“A unicorn . . .Huh?” one bystander exclaimed.

“Yes,” Mary said. “Izzy, N’y was to represent an independent candidate. Remember, you wanted to be eclectic. An independent is an eclectic and less apt to be influenced by loyalty to a party. He is only loyal to the actual issue, I hope.

“But, Isadore, the unicorn horn would not stay on; the chain



would not lock; the banners would not stay straight; the carriage would not balance correctly until the passersby took over. N’y was the only stable factor in the entire equation. After emitting his special waterfall and sprinkling the back of Katie’s car seat with black pellets, he calmly descended to the street and let himself be tied to a post to get painted—gold. But N’y loved being sprayed—



fragrances were his forte. He sniffed appreciatively as he turned

from white to gold; his knees (also forgotten to be cleaned) turned into glimmer. A paper tail was attached, all of which produced a somewhat medieval effect as the parade assembled.



“And the band played on . . . and on . . . and on. And N’y plodded on . . . and on . . . and on, no longer knowing whether he was a unicorn or even a goat. He followed faithfully, heaving and gasping for breath. But he followed.



“It was only when the announcer boomed: ‘Second prize to the unicorn . . . ‘did I see red,” Mary said. “I asked N’y to come to the stand because he was the hero, but he would not move until I started running. Then I think he thought I was leaving him and not knowing what else to do, he ran. The ribbon did not make an impression on N’y but the hugs and kisses did. I took him to ‘Oly’s stall as guest of honor and he was fed, watered and gloated over. It was a triumphant ride.”

And, Mary said, she took all the ribbons the next day and put them around her neck and walked around the grounds, herself the exhibit. “What did you win?” someone asked.

Faith in animal nature, she said.

And the Katie, the phenomenon and her car stayed until everyone got home. I was exultant and the glow glimmered around the stable for days. I even condescended to eat some alfalfa to celebrate.

The glow from the fair glamourized even the mundane, even the anti-climax. Our pets, the usual itinerant mice, frolicsome birds, and one family of slugs on our socially approved colleagues list celebrated. We preferred the slugs; they ate less grain at the party.

We wrote to Bob to tell him about the events and to see if he might be returning, but he answered and said, “Not yet, don’t you know that you have a German shepherd on hand?” The German Shepherdess nodded. Her muzzle was already tightly affixed.

My latest bag of literary tidbits had been perplexing. In it were worms, twigs and pellets. I was quite puzzled.

“Isadore, those are punctuation marks,” said Mary, taking off the muzzle to breathe. “They go in between words and they say things, sometimes dramatic things!”

“What things?” I asked. I took some and scattered them over the page I was working on.

“Not that way,” the helicopter said, shocked. “You have to insert them just so.” She took a worm and put it behind a word.

“I don’t want a worm in my book,” I said.

“But the editor will put them in if I don’t; besides, it’s not a worm; it’s a comma.”

“I refuse to be intimidated by a comma. I like this colon better. Colons function.”

“But, Isadore, Mary said, there are already too many pellets around here.”

Added to this, the critics came again. I should not have asked my evaluation to be re-evaluated, I realized.

“Isadore, we read your draft. It’s fair, but you should watch your vocabulary.”

“What’s wrong with it?” I showed the one tooth I had available. “I got my vocabulary right from the dictionary.”

“Choose them more carefully. You must be precise and each word must say exactly what you mean—no flowery phrases.”

“But I chose to have a gothic style,” I said.

“Never heard of it,” they said.

“It’s my own type of literary construction,” I answered. “I just pick up a handful of words and eat them. Then I eat flowers for dessert. In fact, I just had lupine for lunch and let me tell you what a beautiful phrase, they composed: ‘Look at the horizon; someone has stirred the sugared clouds, whipped them with sun butter and smoothed the batter into the horizon’!”

“Too many calories,” said the critic.

“Isadore, you are saying what words have never said before,” cried the German Shepherd.

I bleated and scattered commas, exclamation points and dashes all over the page.

“No,” cried the critics. “How can the sun set if it smears its face in butter? It won’t be able to see where it’s going—it won’t know how to get to China.”

“N’y said the sun doesn’t revolve around us; we revolve around it.”

“What does he know about revolution?” barked the critic.

“He is an anarchist; he knows a lot about revolutions!”



In the fast lane

N’y and ‘Oly had been requisitioned for further political service—in Seattle. Mary was again involved in politics or, rather, her candidate was, the unicorn. Because the pumpkin seeds had escaped retribution, she assumed another idea might succeed as well.

“But Mary, your job?” I asked fearfully. “And our grain?” If you bit off more than you can chew, is there any way I can eat up some of it for you?

“Oh, this is worth losing my job for,” she said. “And then we all could become vagrants.”

I didn’t even want to ask what that ominous word meant. The only solution was the trough.

The candidate had scheduled his last campaign fete on the night of the election. It was to be a buffet in Seattle and all “volunteers” were naturally invited. Hmmmm, Mary thought. The volunteer who actually worked the hardest was N’y. I could take him and ‘Oly along for company. ‘Oly has been more amenable of late. He is still thrilled over his ribbons.

The decision was made, transportation arranged and N’y and ‘Oly arrived at her Seattle home near the Sound. With regrets, she tied each one to a strong post on the porch to await the event. But, Isadore, N’y will tell you the story. And N’y who hardly ever talks, talked.

N’y’s story was choked with exclamation marks.

“You’re going to use up my entire supply of them,” I exclaimed!

“But this is *high* priority,” he emphasized. “I can’t tell you what happened without using them.”

I reluctantly took a few from the bag. “Is this enough?” I asked. And N’y took all of them to tell us of his Seattle adventures.

“First we went to the party!” Even Katie came! She gave us courage.

“What was the menu?”

“Isadore, the menu was the political aura.”

“Do you mean aura doors?”

“I don’t know, but we were so amazing to the politicians that we never went to the table. They oo’d and awed. No goat had ever come to any party they attended before, they said. And we told them we were independents, just like the candidate. We said there should not be Democrats or Republicans, just anarchists and dictators.”

“What did the candidate say?”

“Well, that was the only problem. He did not look pleased, even when Mary went in line to offer congratulations.”

“So . . . since we had been receiving plaudits for almost half an hour she thought it might be expedient if we left. She was afraid the candidate might think we were stealing the show. We were. Also we had not ‘peed’ and she thought if we left the party quickly, it would prevent a serious reputational catastrophe.”

“Did you make it out the door?”

“Yes, she collected us from our fans and even though we marched by the buffet table, we held our heads high and did not sample any of the contents. Isadore, maybe you could put the items on the table in your table of contents: we saw caviar, champagne, *fois gras*, crab cakes, shrimp *en casserole* . . . and that word you didn’t want to eat—eel – even that was there.”

I felt exultant and proud. “Was electroencephalogram there?”

“Electrodes were everywhere in the room—politics sizzled – but we, of course, were just interested in observing the grams. But there’s more. But I need lots more punctuation to tell what happened next.” And I took the skinny, vertical twig.

“No, you can’t use an exclamation point for that,” I interrupted. “Please give it back.”

“But we visited six houses—inside,” said N’y.

“Six houses?” I wilted and gave the mark back.

“Yes, And, furthermore, Isadore, you see, I used commas to conserve on the exclamation points. Period.” The normally quiet N’y sang.

“What else happened?” I asked. Then I realized I had used up almost all the question marks.

“I was all costumed even but that isn’t the strangest thing.”

“What was?” I begged.

“Give me, please more marks and I’ll tell you more,” he bargained.

I grabbed an entire footfull. A diet of exclamation points was perhaps a bit indigestible but I added more.

“Cookies?” I dreamed and remembered how I started my San Juan career – equipment to write.

“Then finally on the way back here,” said N’y, “we were riding along quite nicely in a borrowed car. Actually, a friend had given it to Mary but he forgot to tell her not to drive over 60 miles an hour! And she drives at 80 usually.

“Oh, N’y, please take out the last sentence. I could get another ticket,” said Mary.

“But I like it, Mary. And we rode along quite calmly for half an hour or so settled down in the rear seat when suddenly there was a tearing sound.”

“Like cloth?”

“No, I can’t describe it, but it was terrible—like something wrenched apart that is meant to stay together. A metallic rip. Hardware. Something for our reticulums!”

“What happened then?”

“We careened across the freeway at the edge of some woods and the car stopped by itself. Mary got out and ran around the car—she said later she thought she had blowouts.”

“Were there?”

“No, but coming back in – Isadore – I need more marks – thank you – smoke started to come in the car. She screamed at me and opened the door. I untangled my legs and came right out, ‘Oly right after me, and we ran into the woods! Then I saw the orange and red colors--like rubies and topazes-- come out from under the car. Mary called them flames. She got out again; but the colors kept coming.”

I reached for more exclamation points and handed them to N’y. I could see he would not be able to finish without them. “What did you do?”

“Oh, I was sampling the exotic vegetation! Not bad. Of course, though the colors were jumping higher and then I realized that, of course, it was fire. Mary was terribly nervous. But I was eating as much as possible because I didn’t know how long I could stay in this wonderful area. But Mary said our car could explode, what ever that means. But afterwards—after quite a long time—another car flashed by making a loud noise; it had blue and white lights and it turned around and stopped! Oh, I forgot, the flames had died down somewhat. But when the car stopped, we came out of the woods to look at the new car, to see what model it was.”

“Oh,” I cried, “N’y, take the punctuation bag. Maybe we can requisition more marks.”

N’y put a few marks in his teeth.

“Don’t let them get in your rumen! Then we’ll never know the rest of the story! Ach, now I’ve used two more. One crisis after another.”

“Settle down, mother,” said a complacent ‘Oly. He had found an uneaten blade of grass nearby and could be calm.

“But, Isadore, when the two men got out of the car and saw us, they laughed.”

“Laughed,” I queried weakly.

“Yes, laughed and laughed!” said N’y in a puzzled tone.

“What then?”

“Well, when they controlled themselves, they took a gun that smoked and puffed the colors—that fire—away. Then they got in their car. Mary got in the back seat, the same seat I had sat in—in her car, and they talked.

“Where were you and ‘Oly?”

“Oh, we were waiting right outside. But then it started to rain and I wiggled into the back seat with Mary and then they started laughing again. They were laughing so hard they couldn’t even talk into a black box.”

“What were they saying?”

“Oh, things like ‘you need someone to come and get you.’ And ‘the car is not going to explode. It’s still full of gas.’”

Strange, I thought. I always feel more like exploding when I am *full* of gas. “So . . . “

“The men in the blue and white car called – they called the phenomenon.”

“Do you mean *the* Katie?”

“Yes, I heard her commiserate loudly . . . but then say she couldn’t come—that she would telephone another friend.”

N’y looked at me curiously. “Isadore, may I comment on the fact that I have used up all the question marks.”

“Oh!”

“And there goes another exclamation point, right out of my teeth.”

“Stop everyone,” said ‘Oly, “and let me take an inventory.”

He counted carefully and then said: “we have thirty commas left, five periods and eight semicolons left—and oh, several dashes but . . . not enough to finish.

I could not even respond to that and I did not dare use any periods “What a hapless situation we have created

“Conserve your narrative, and proceed, N’y.” Even though ill equipped, I felt I must assert my authority

“Only four periods left now,” said ‘Oly

N’y maneuvered carefully to refrain from using the marks “Finally the men drove away and we went back to our first car, the borrowed car—it had marks on it where the flames had been and part of it was black but it was not smoking any longer” (N’y did not even take another period in case it was needed for an emergency) “We got in and we were very quiet

“Oh,” I cried, suspense without punctuation marks is unbearable I took another point out of N’y’s mouth “ So . . . ? I queried raising my voice in an inflectory manner hoping that he would answer

“After a very long time another car came with a friend of Katie’s in it She said Mary could go back with her but we could not

“Oh! I had used the last exclamation point.

“Mama,” said ‘Oly now you can not hear the rest of the story.

“I will go on – said N’y. We did not know how to hitch hike or if we got a ride, where we should hitch hike to

‘Oly was rummaging around in the bag Ach some letters are out of supply, to “

Go on I must hear how you got back

Mary said she could not go without us that we would behave goats finally the lady let us in

She drove us back to Seattle. That’s why we got to go jogging 5 days more Tomorrow I finish

No Incredible Please collect some more twigs.

I will get more *now* said Oly – Look! A twig and a spot of dirt will make that point thing! N’y, here’s a few more. Keep on going.

“So we got to stay in Seattle for five days, said N’y operating on twigs! There wasn’t time to go back that weekend because Mary had to work. She still had her job. So when we were chained again to our post, we didn’t mind a bit. It was wonderful. All week we lounged on the patio in the day time and went jogging to the beach in the mornings and evenings. People flocked along beside us. We were invited to six houses—inside of

them, with Persian carpets We saw animals sewed right into them We ate watermelon. Can you imagine eating water? A lady cut up an apple for us in her kitchen. Only once ‘Oly peed—just a tiny bit, Isadore, and the hostess didn’t even mind it She fed us cookies.”

“No wonder you are so fluent, N’y,” I exclaimed. “Did you get the recipe?”

“Only two periods left,” shouted ‘Oly

I was flumm ed – I know Bob took the ox to help me but someone can put him back to make the word all right.

I had forgotten to ask about the candidate. “Did he win?”

“He won on San Juan County but he lost in the state,” both N’y and ‘Oly blurted.

“Does that mean he didn’t get a purple ribbon and can’t go to the Western Washington fair?” I said. “And he had ‘Oly and N’y and support staff?”

I stumbled to the corner of the goatel—what word could describe this debacle. I pawed the latest sack for a stray word. There huddled in a dark corner was a wet, stringy, limp one. I held it up: ignominy! Then I threw it back.

There would be more elections.*

The next day was spent trying to restock our supply of punctuation and letters. Without a new supply, no one would understand us. But we had been “spoiled” so much before, we had little enthusiasm to break twigs into the right sizes and shapes. Still we fashioned a small supply should an emergency conversation be necessary. But the birds heard of our predicament and came in with hundreds of twigs on which ‘Oly and N’y stamped, sizing and shaping them correctly.

I thought I felt like recovering. One must feel better to emit a high quality laugh such as we had over our political attempts. And maybe it was time to take my health seriously. I went to the trough to mull over the virtues of a grain of cracked corn compared to a barley flake. A straw tickled my nose.

N’y and ‘Oly checked the bookcase to search out volumes on campaign promises.

“It’s not ‘promises’ you want,” I said; you must look for strategies to win elections.”

Footnote: Although without ‘Oly’s or N’y’s assistance, two years later, the candidate won a Senate seat and went to Washington, D.C. to be transparent.

“But that’s what we learned at the buffet,” they told me: “you win by promising and serving food. We want to learn catering and then we’ll apply to volunteer for cuisine management.”

“But you would eat all the goodies before they even got served,” I said.



Sí vis pacem, para bellum

If you want peace, prepare for war.

This we learned from our rat colleagues who, like any inquisitive intellectuals had invaded the library, burrowing into books, diverse volumes like the Bible, Zoroaster, Shakespeare – and they ate those authors, just like Jeremiah did.

“Ma, you never told me who he was,” complained ‘Oly.

I did not know the procedure to explain someone I did not know but asked the rat in charge to please enlighten us.

“Jeremiah was a prophet,” he said. “He analyzed political conditions and was not afraid to talk about them. And in 600 B.C., those conditions were not good.”

“What was wrong with them?” queried N’y who noticed me frowning. (I was only anxious about our supply of punctuation which, even though replenished by twigs was nevertheless in a tenuous condition.)

“Well,” said the rat, there were peace activists one of whom Jeremiah was and there were the war mongers, the ones with horns. Jeremiah believed Israel could not defend itself against Nebuchadnezzar who *was* prepared for war. He said Israel should surrender and pay the bill it owed to Babylon.”

“What happened to him?” I asked thinking of the attempt at politics in Seattle and the results.

“He went to prison,” said the rat, “but he had a secretary called Baruch the Scribe who visited and wrote down everything he said – and then gave it to the king. Of course, the king did not want any more inroads in his budget, even if they were legitimate—you see he owed Nebuchadnezzar from the previous battle.”

“Didn’t the king have some VISA cards?” I asked.

“I don’t know; if he did, he didn’t use them,” answered the rat.

And we decided that should our VISA cards become ill, *we* should have a meeting of the board to prepare for war—war with winter.

“What should we put on our agenda for the meeting?” I asked.

“Which board should we use?” asked N’y. “How about this nice ten foot one that held up the meeting where the eight pumpkins were at. Now it’s holding up the new construction? And I can bring more boards if we have more members.”

“No, thank you, N’y.” (I knew where he was going to get more boards.) “Language is so complex,” I muttered. Here is that word “board” and it means so many things like a piece of wood, or it can mean food or if I rearrange the letters; it also means dull, bored.”

“I’ll take the second meaning,” said ‘Oly said before anyone else could claim it.

“And I, I said, would like to employ Baruch the Scribe as my official ghoat writer. Mary is keyboarding my draft; maybe he would do the final edit.”

“How will you find him?” ‘Oly asked.

“I think he’s on the Internet and hopefully unemployed.” I said. Next item?”

“Winter defense techniques,” said N’y. We debated what defense we would have for the winter for winter had in its own arsenal: nature: wind, cold, rain, ice and snow. I had my four legged coat and ‘Oly and N’y had their youth.

It was a weekend of opaqueness. Nature grasped the sodden clouds, wrung them out and squeezed again, right over our heads. We lounged in the goatel until late afternoon and took a brief stroll during a precipitous intermission.

My pedicure appointment had been postponed. Mary needed to schedule it against that of our further adventures to the neighbors. If delayed and the weather was precipitous, we would not as likely visit the neighbors. Yet, the pedicure was needed before the frost tinged my precarious circulation. While waiting for these negotiations, I had my own priorities; namely, my feet which hurt. And I had inherited the mange from a generous dog, I did not need another ailment for my to-be-spoiled-more list, still the mange might have other advantages.

It was the annual celebration of *Yom Kippur*. Mary threw the lots for ‘Oly and N’y. Strangely enough, ‘Oly retained the position of Sacrifice Goat and N’y happily escaped as the scapegoat, and carried our sins into oblivion. I consulted my rumen (my first stomach) for advice. It recommended re-digestion and I referred the sorrow back to my rumen several times before it consented finally to enter the reticulum for further analysis.

I called ‘Oly and said to him: “Son, you were my hope for the next generation. How can you be the sacrificial goat twice?”

“But, ma, weren’t you supposed to be that hope when you were young? Were you?”

Was I? I couldn’t remember. I’m afraid that I have had a sudden memory loss. It was beautifully strange that we had come to the land of milk and honeyed words. My third stomach poked my fourth. I decided to live—volcanoes permitting—not so much because of resolve but because of the strength of inertia was greater than my discomfort. I didn’t quite know the procedure to die either. I heard of an organization called “hospice” but it was limited to humans; nevertheless, I thought I might be able to imbibe some advice. My lung worms were willing to die but nature said “not yet.” And winter was busy, weaving a wonderful winter coat for me. “I don’t remember,” I said. “We had no career choices then; this generation does.”

A lull had ensued in our lives and I thought I might check the status of the political bag. I carefully untied the strings—it was such a volatile bag—and bit off as much of the red tape as I could. I was singing:

Assassinations	10
Border infiltrations (I could understand those)	100
Embassies assaulted	4
The budget	----

Hadn’t I seen these types of problems before? Those two asses? They did not have cures either. I shut the bag.

I opened the local bag: “Our planning for other volcanoes in the state has been progressing . . . “

“What,” I asked my rumen. “Isn’t one volcano sufficient?”

Apparently not. “We are now in our third draft of Mt. Baker and when that is finished, we’ll start on Mt. Rainier,” said the authority. “Mt. Baker is the first priority; most likely of all the volcanoes in that chain to erupt.” *

Draft? I ruminated. Drafts are not good for goats. I suggest that possibly Mt. Baker’s steam emissions were only due to the fact that it was smoking cigarettes. The expert did not agree; neither did Mary and our masks were kept carefully on a ledge waiting I did not know how my catarrh would be compatible with a mask but

Footnote: From the *Seattle Post Intelligencer* on March 20, 1981.

Footnote to the footnote: Later assessments indicated this volcanic area was not linked to chain reactions. Mt. Baker and Mt. Rainier, though empathetic remained intact.

I took the paper and ate it up. That should nullify any further news on the issue and I went back to my “lull”; only my thoughts were as viscous as the possibility of flowing lava, I found. I checked the velocity of sound waves for the rocks underneath my feet but was interrupted by N’y who was checking the viscosity of our food supply.

I realized our “stable” news needed more attention for ‘Oly was beginning to need room service. “Resurgence” seemed like an appropriate word at this time. It came highly recommended from my bin, a word that had been bandied about quite successfully in social, cultural and economic circles

I saw him lurch in the stable, his only diversion testing whether our structure with its own broken back could long endure. It could not. It broke. A distressed shepherdess hurried into town for the ads. There was one. She dialed.

Michael
General Work

“This is that number but I don’t think any Michael is here.”

“Well, there is an ad at the post office that says Michael at this number does general labor.”

“Well, I’ve been gone a couple of weeks working. Sometimes other fellows take care of the house. If you could call back on Monday . . . I might be able to find out who lives here.”

“On Monday, I won’t be here – I’ll be working . . . “

On the following weekend a similar ad appeared:

“General work”
Ask for Joe

“Is Joe there?”

“No, who is Joe?”

“There is an ad in the paper that says . . . “

“Never heard of Joe.”

N’y, hiding behind a hay bale chuckled.

And who should come to the rescue but ‘Oly. “Mary,” he said, “we have a lot of carpenter ants available.”

Could they rebuild ‘Oly? I asked myself?



Hmmmmmm

And then the word became animated. I could tell by the lift of voices and there were four of them, one of them our vet. I listened carefully as he examined ‘Oly.

“Hmmm.” He said.

That was a new diagnose to me. All sorts of possibilities lay with that inflection.

“What is ‘Oly’s prognosis?” I asked tentatively, hopefully.

“Hmmm.”

I quavered. Mary, Bob and Carol dispensed diagnoses liberally but the expert limited his own to the one sound, hmmm.

But seeing my perplexity, the vet produced a reassuring, lumpy phrase: “possible contracted tendon.”

I was relieved. The diagnosis had several syllables, therefore dignity, and even though nebulous, a future. “But it will require research,” he added.

We thanked him and I asked Mary for reference books to study myself. In an in-depth survey of them, I could not, however, find “Hmmm.” I did find fascinating diseases like coccidiosis and hemorrhagic septicemia. I then noticed that ‘Oly’s right knee was becoming tumescent. That type of leg must run in the family . . . but not far away enough, I thought.

N’y, exhausted from his frustrations as goat-in-waiting now became the court jester and began to bum cigarettes, poking his head unexpectedly in the door and, above all, keeping tabs on the new plants that had surreptitiously invaded the atrium during ‘Oly’s siege.

He found an azalea, one day old, plucked it out of hiding and left it. He did not visit 'Oly, only 'Oly's room service utensils, plucking last bits of grain. A pheasant with marauding instincts joined the fray and tried to peck N'y. I examined the word "reconstruction" again, noticing that its bumps, though highly polished were gnarled with political gloss. I put that word back in the library of shelved vocabulary. New words wiggled out:

Walking cast, Master of the Horse
Sling, Bob
Antibiotic, Dr. Porter
Hospital, Dr. Anderson
Amputation
Euthanasia

'Oly started with the cast and found it nibbling proof.
Mary put splints on the house. N'y knocked them off.
I looked at my own spindles, my legs, and saw they were now porcelain.
Heaven wept, then dried its face with a cloud.

The prescription of 'walking cast' by Ernie Gann's Master of the Horse had been chosen. 'Oly made his camp "without the camp." He was calm, quiet, jubilant to receive even a drink of water and he nibbled at his guests fingers as well as his cast. I stood in the stable doorway and looked at him. I consulted every possible book. And one day, the cast came off. Then I groaned over the vast armies of bacteria that were prepared to invade:

Infection
Clostridium perfringens
E-coli

"I don't want to know you," I said. I tried to push words from my knowledge but like the force of bacteria, they surged forward. I shut the book. But that did not smash my thoughts.

Only 'Oly was cheerful and announced his continued existence with an optimistic whinny to the pheasant which had come again for dinner. Even though I wanted to cry, I took out my colored words and sketched the tail of the pheasant: beige, black, magenta, ivory, blush and the pheasant, delighted to be painted, flaunted its wings before it took off.

I put my brush back and took the book again. What defense was there? I read:

Yoghurt
Buttermilk
Lactobacillus

I surveyed these new monstrosities and surprisingly found them to be allies. Would Bob's ulcers consider them? 'Oly, faced with yet another prescription found them to be

repulsive but not repulsive enough to desist from eating. I relaxed ever so slightly for more official bacteriological pellets were being marshaled. So were the island turkeys which came from the eastern side just to visit 'Oly on the western side.

'Oly was transferred to the hospital, resplendent, thrilled only to have gained a seat inside the car again. He told me later he was now a professional patient. It had come about suddenly. He was taken carefully from his sling (fashioned by Bob earlier) in the brambles and dragged in a carpet over the rocks. 'Oly, so ecstatic to be moving anywhere exerted himself and helped hoist himself into the car. There seated luxuriously in back, he whinnied—at last—another coveted ride; it was only the destination that was nebulous.



Later, he informed me on arrival at the hospital, he was escorted by attendants not quite certain what danger his horns presaged. 'Oly, half walked himself through the doors—his wagging tail the symbol of elation.

X-ray
Consultations
Seven vets
A new bandage
A bill

And a splendidly worded, multi-syllabic prescription: euthanasia.

"No," cried Mary and several days later and a wet, stained, crumpled 'Oly was lifted back into the car, his only concern being that his horns went in, also. He was silent until, at the ferry dock, he gazed fitfully toward the water and gave one bleat.



"Did any of the vets say 'HmMMM?' to you," I asked him fearfully when he arrived.

"Oh, at the meeting, that's almost all they said," he replied.

"HmMMMM," I said. "But, son, you got a resplendent bandage. Maybe hope is inside that." But when I peeked underneath, hope slithered away.

And he fell asleep on a grassy knoll near the driveway under a canopy of firs so that he could receive visitors in an elegant fashion.

He awoke buffered in hay and was presented with a list of his favorite things for a menu the next morning. He ate the list enthusiastically and I saw hope return . . . but hope had a translucent quality; it was frail, almost as porcelain as my knees. Overnight he had become a monarch—his horns still proud with every bob of his patrician head. In his honor, N’y gave a command performance on the gazebo, ‘Oly commanding and N’y performing. But in the evening, a drink of water, freshly plucked grass and a handful of his favorite grain were graciously refused. “Ma, I mustn’t be ravenous,” he said. Night settled in for its quiet vigil. Mary, dressed in her clothes, slumbered fitfully upstairs but I could not rest; I stood at the door of the stable.

Suddenly I cried out—a ripping bleat. Mary upstairs sat up. “Isadore,” she cried, go to sleep.” But in that second, ‘Oly was rendering his life. He made two trumpet blasts and I could hear Mary running outside to ‘Oly. She held him; she held her hand on his heart which beat softer and softer, then muffled into total nothingness. A bird cried out and I bleated at the same time at the last palpitation.

The earth had stopped. Our house itself plunged into mourning. Spring stifled by clotted aspirations. Nobility spawned by grief. N’y and I left the stable. N’y stood in the gazebo and stared into the nothingness. Was there a path through this impasse? I went to ‘Oly’s mound of hay, pathetic in failure. But a green blade of grass wavered uncertainly in the center. A sprout of hope. I ate it.



New Candidate for First Goat?

Weber came without notice, demure and full of self esteem. “Just steam,” I wanted to say. He came at night. Midnight. In the back seat of a convertible. We exchanged nose introductions. N’y cavorted; I sniffed disapprovingly. Of course, I do not want any competition for the trough and ‘Oly’s memory. However, what is a goat to do? After a romp about the stable, Weber settled in a corner where neither I nor N’y could harass him.

“Weber?” I snorted. But Weber (now officially to be von Weber), I was informed, was the son of a champion, a triplet (but was not my son a champion also)? The next morning, I could see that Weber did not yet realize he had been adopted—he liked the terrain and the cuisine—he was so small he could walk right in the trough. Of course, I disapproved. Being an obstreperous three months old, he challenged N’y to a duel. He won! It was agility over the parried thrusts of an indolent N’y. His explorations over,



von Weber took up a morning snooze in the lounge. More elegant tastes, I mourned. Later he occupied the gazebo. He would hear from N'y about this I surmised. The gazebo was N'y's special territory.

Even though the sun had had much practice during the summer, it barely heaved itself up over the horizon the next day. Brian, his owner came to say good bye and little Weber cried on his departure. His bleat could not be heard above the roar of the convertible and Weber, deserted, disconsolately trotted after the resolute N'y, finally diverted by a tempting blackberry vine. That afternoon Weber snuggled by me. I do resent him—but then—I had no son; Weber had no mother. The fragrance of intimacy wafted into the stable. “It’s all right if he’s *von* Weber,” I said. “One royal has left; we must have a replacement. There’s none better than a descendant of King Edward.”

N'y, a magnanimous host first extended himself being delighted with his new diversion. Then, on the second day, he saw that his new comrade ate. Ate? N'y was insulted. Eating was not an activity to be left unchallenged. Whenever Weber approached the trough, N'y whisked him aside by a thrust of his head. “That impertinence,” he said.

Weber, feather light, fluffed back into stand-by position to await his turn from a respectful distance. I saw conflict approaching. It was apparent that we all wanted to be “First Goat” now that ‘Oly no longer monopolized the arena. Even though Mary had put the bell on my neck and although flattered, I knew I could not sustain “First Goat” credentials due to my disabilities.

“How about being First Goat Emeritus?” Mary asked. I acquiesced with a gracious nod: believing anything Latinized would be elevating.

N'y felt he should have the title by virtue of being the only goat at his first residence. Weber seceded reluctantly but we felt at the conference N'y must be acknowledged for his seniority rating was much superior.

We goats do not conceal our true feelings like humans and burrow underground with contrived and subtle digs—N'y's eyes were inflamed with jealousy when I was served first and when Weber made the mistake of eating the first bite. Whereas ‘Oly had been a naughty goat that became a hero, N'y was the good goat that was becoming naughty—biting and pushing. Negotiation and arbitration was our only recourse. It was suggested that possibly we should contact a Secretary of State for our concern. Or perhaps Kaiser Wilhelm I would decide. Even the wind curled up asleep in the valley woke up with a snarl. The snake? I wondered.

I compensated by deciding to involve myself in my French lesson. I was perplexed about my continuing education when I was so infirm but here French could be procured over the Canadian Broadcasting Company from Montreal. Oh? Would my Parisian accent be compromised? I was naturally concerned for my vocabulary only consisted of ten or twelve words and continuing lessons would definitely taint my delivery. I decided to listen facing east (closer to France—of course, that meant it was also closer to Montreal)

so I listened facing west. And I did learn a new phrase that day: *Je 'nais se pais!* And my pronunciation had a marvelous sonorous nasal twist. Catarrhal helped.

Je 'nais se pais anything. Turbulence at home; Bob's ulcers quavering. But he wrote "the stuff I'm taking is making me drowsy and narcoleptic and sapping my ambition. And somewhere down the line is the cessation of smoking . . . and coffee." That would be the death of Bob, I thought—the *cessation* of smoking.

"I saw the X-rays of my tum-tum, and there are three ulcers. But they're not malignant. I'll be back soon."

Now I had someone to care for again. Even N'y's easement into First Goat seemed to progress better until later the incident *de jour* occurred. Construction ("no, reconstruction" I cried) had begun again and Weber, adopted from carpenters was an avid supervisor. He walked in the hard hat area with no hat at all and, furthermore, nibbled at its edges. I, absorbed in French, was astounded when Weber's name was shouted and an instantaneous crash was heard. "Ach." I resorted to German. Why didn't he read the construction manual carefully. I saw Weber bound out and saw him come back with a limp. No, I thought. It must not be. Weber had just been a candidate for paraplegia and, attractive though the word sounded, no. But the limp limped away on all four legs to test more 2x4's—more resilient than 4x8's, I was relieved to note. My sense of terror limped away, also. We could not sustain more tragedy.



N'y was adapting to the subtleties of upward mobility with less belligerence. The weight of responsibility—having to be something he was not accustomed to—affected his charm. He was less buoyantly affectionate and more calculating—his sulking time: about one week, about the same time it had taken the Bantams to acclimate. But when he realized there was to be little competition from us, he adopted the opposite behavior. In fact, he would no longer go for a walk if I was not in an ambulatory mood. He nibbled on grass that only grew nearby, on our legal pasture. I didn't know his intentions: was this for me or was he guarding the food from my predatory instincts which were in short supply at that time. But we even enjoyed the BBC together in our orchestra seats. My old N'y had returned.

Weber, yet unconscious of the psychological labyrinths of hierarchy, careened about, tap dancing on wooden surfaces and delighting in high ledges. I thought the reason he was given to us was that he may have disturbed the carpenters whereas we had little construction remaining. We had found the carpenters, when finally pinned to their telephone numbers, had straightened our crooked beams and left us souvenirs, an enhancement to our diet: carcinogens. For dessert we ate paint, caulking, asbestos, all enchanting and forbidden.

My clumps of the last winter's hair only dropped off in July and I, who had been so ugly had now a misty, glistening coat of white delicate threads. I was beautiful. I wanted to

go to the fair and get a blue ribbon for the having the best worms. “But, Isadore,” said Mary, they don’t allow lung thread worms there. They are highly unpopular.” I knew it, of course. It was just that if I had to have worms, I wanted the longest—as long as an encephalogram, at least.

And Bob was back—he had finished his essay. “Teach us to be mediocre,” we shouted.

“That would be impossible!”

While we missed our fresh-faced trio of “kids,” we delighted in a plethora of cigarettes with Bob. The prescription seemed a long time ago.



Of course, we needed another staff meeting the title of which was “The care and feeding of the elderly,” aka “The care and feeding of worms.” A title such as that merited my full attention. I listened to the following:

- ∞ Should the lung thread worms have their own feed and water containers?
Yes
- ∞ Protection from harassment by N’y? Weber? Yes
- ∞ Their own hay bale (Even better)
- ∞ Eight foot corridor for exercise (Not bad)

I rocked back and forth quickly. It was my new technique to gain enough momentum to get up. I got up – my spindles wavering but my resolve firm. I creaked out of the goatel and began browsing wishing I had my tiara again.



Samantha

And then a diversion appeared on the runway, a refugee trying to appear inconspicuous, Samantha.



You could not possibly imagine the expression on Mary’s face when she arrived the following weekend: it was the definition of amazement; I didn’t even need my dictionary.

“This is Samantha,” N’y and Weber hurriedly explained. She came out of the woods one day this week and we invited her for lunch, but she thought we used the plural, ‘lunches’. She likes us, we think.”

“Or do you think she likes the lunches?” asked Mary.

“Oh, yes; in fact, N’y is almost ready to send her back because he says she is dipping into the family fortune.”



“I will look in the paper to see if anyone is missing a sheep, said Mary. I hope not.”

And there were no ads for lost animals. And Samantha stayed, becoming more

acclimated; in fact, quite at home: no fences, no shepherds, no time cards, no supervision but food and an attentive escort.” Maybe she ran away from the sheep shearer.” I said.



“That could be so because her coat is so thick,” said Bob.

Mary bought her a spinning wheel. And yarn for this story.



And the next weekend a big announcement for us. “I’ve been asked to submit my house for a contest,” said Mary. “And because it is rather unique I thought I would submit it as the best “stable” in the land. Therefore, we all must be part of the package.”



“But animals are usually outside, aren’t they?” I asked. “In all the magazines I’ve chewed up, I’ve never seen an animal conducting a house tour.”

“Horses are shown in their stalls, but remember how you always want to come inside and I won’t let you—except for parties. This will be special. And different.”

We came out of mourning; we were again brushed, clipped and attired for the event. Weber even washed his face.



The pictures were developed and sent. We waited and waited. And we are still waiting. Only Samantha with hauteur lifted her nose in disdain. She was above such disappointments.



And then one day there *was* an ad in the paper for a lost sheep. We were desolate Samantha's nose dropped. Mary reluctantly answered the ad:

At Your Service

Lost & found - 400
FOUND: The lost sheep. Contact 378-5847.

Negotiations quivered. Mary hoped Samantha's owners would find her to be a disturbed teen ager and would not have the budget a psychologist. No, they arrived, a force of three. No analytically tests were given. Regretfully, Samantha left.



Oh, I thought, I must go back to being an invalid for excitement. And another severe bout of anti-climax! What is the prescription for that?

That night N'y developed a cough instead. It blended well on the harmonic scale with mine and hers but N'y's being new had a creatively ominous sound. Mary rushed in with garlic and hugs. N'y, satisfied that he, too, was eligible for pampering, pranced about to debate about the new techniques he would need to develop to the next challenge. Weber could definitely contribute new ideas for this, I thought. And then there was another gun shot; it was night. These shots were getting more frequent, I referred them to my reticulum for further consideration.



Yom Kippur

It was approaching autumn, *Yom Kippur*. In between nasal drips, I remembered the scapegoat ceremony and was, frankly, worried. I called for Bob. He arrived with a bag of treats.



After my explanation, he laughed. "Iz, haven't you heard what happened? A lamb took the goats' places."

I said. "No lamb would do that for a goat."

"No, but an emissary has," he said. "This was a perceptive lamb—a special lamb—perfect. He would only like to be acknowledged."

I pawed the hay restlessly. Abrogating the sacrificial ceremony would be a relief. I remembered my inhospitality to N'y when he first came and I would even butt Weber now but my aggressive capabilities and range were limited to a few feet.

"But I haven't been the best goat. And there isn't much time to change"

"The thief that died on the cross with Jesus hadn't been the best guy, either and he had no time at all. Yet he got to go to Paradise—that day."

"Why. What did he do to be eligible?"

"Iz, he was sorry for his mistakes and he just believed Jesus *was* God."

"Are you sure this lamb really died instead of the goats? Instead of us?"

"Yes, and that's not all: there's a fringe benefit."

“What?”

“You will get to meet him –in the flesh.”

“Even if worms destroy my body, yet shall I . . . “

“ . . . see God. Yes – just like Job, without worms, of course.”

“When?”

“At some unspecified time in the future, you will go to another stable—forever.”

“How will I know if it’s the right one?”

“When you see a lamb and a wolf lying down together or ‘Oly with a leopard.”

“But what about my worms?”

“They will have a separate interview, I think.”

“I accept,” I said. “I love this plan. I love this lamb already. Will he be there?”

“Yes, he’s already waiting for you.”



Arrival at Home

I pushed back into the stable that night to avoid the wind. Later that night I heard two shots; I heard bleats and, loudest of all, I heard silence. I rocked; I wiggled but only when morning came, was I able to roll up and out of the stable. N’y and Weber lay on the ground, silent.

Where, oh, where was this lamb? My eyes were as black as my fright. I reeled crazily and fell. My legs were sod.

Then I heard a car. Doors slammed. I heard Bob. Another man.

“Isadore,” called Bob, “someone heard shots and called the deputy. Where are you? Isadore!”

I whimpered and could do no more.

And then Bob shouted again. “Isadore?”

I made a great effort and bleated. Someone *had* heard.

“God,” said Bob as he sat down beside me. “What happened?”

“Two shots,” I said. “That is all I know except there have been shots before this, at night.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” cried Bob.

“I just thought it was a hunter, maybe. I hesitated: “was it our snake in the Garden of Eden? Mary said there was a snake in the Garden of Eden.”

“Yes, a real snake. Izzy, whoever it was took Weber’s horns and shot N’y through the neck.”

The deputy stepped into our stable: “Sorry, this was a Satanic execution. I’m going to the office for back up.”

I shivered. Was it because they believed?



“Iz, said Bob as he held me close. “Do you know where N’y and Weber are now?”

“With *the* God? If they are like the thief on the cross, they are in Paradise – and there is no snake there.” I said it hesitantly.

“Yes, and they are not sad at all. They are having a party. We should celebrate.” And he brought out my favorite goodies, oatmeal cookies. “Remember, Isadore, this is what you ate on the truck when you came. I found these at the store.”

I took a cautious raisin out of the cookie, and then the whole thing. “I should be able to say a few words in a few minutes as soon as this cookie takes effect, shouldn’t I?” And I rested my head on his lap and he stroked my head. “I’m so sorry, Izzy.”

And Bob stayed at the edge of eternity with me. “Bob what shall I wear to meet God?” It was a pressing question.

“Isadore, God will like anything you wear because he is only interested in what your heart is wearing. But after you arrive he will give you a beautiful bride’s gown.

Remember, you said Ecclesiastes 3:20 says “all (humanity and animals) go to one place so you will see us again.

“And I have something special to tell you: I have a diagnosis, too, a *respectable* one, cancer” (and he grinned) “so you will see me again, too, Izzy. Soon. And I’ll try to persuade Mary to get sick, to get a really good, multisyllabic diagnosis, too.”

“But Mary has to stay here and coordinate my syllables; into words that will talk, that will say what words have never said before.”

“Oh, Izzy,” said Bob. He took out my brush and flicked it over my silver thistledown. I reached out for another coo . . . when suddenly I was in a lush meadow . . . with a choir of birds, and ‘Olyphant, wearing a crown of horns, N’y with a badge in public relations, and Weber *wearing* a hard hat. They pranced and danced, radiant with joy, flanked with the honor guard of a chic, friendly leopard. “Meet our best friend, mother,” ‘Oly said to me. The leopard bowed and waved his tail.

“My mother,” “‘Oly said to the leopard. And bowed. I did a pirouette and pranced myself.

“Ma,” said ‘Oly, “and look over here, there’s the wolf that was in Isaiah, too. With Samantha – she was not happy when she left but having had advanced training in vagrancy with us she changed residences again. She loves her wolf escort.” Samantha, wearing a heavenly wool coat, bounded over to hug me.

“We didn’t have time to say goodbye, Isadore,” cried N’y nuzzling me with his nose. “Welcome. We want to give you a tour. You must see everything but especially the twelve foundations of the walls, all set with *gems*, all colors! Think what pictures you can make.”

“Gems? Where are they, where?” I asked.

“In Revelation chapter 21,” Weber answered. “I help polish the stones. We’ll go tomorrow.”

“Isadore,” you can use all your French here, said N’y but, oh, excuse me: It’s time for *your* appointment. ‘Oly . . . ? “

“Mother, come.”

“He linked me gently onto his horn.

We trotted over to three magnificent thrones. One throne was empty, a radiance was at the center one and another person on its right, a person who somehow also looked like a lamb. “Jesus?” Was Jesus the door into the box? To God? Jesus! I would have cried but he said “no sorrow exists here.” He smiled.

“And may I introduce you to the third person--the third chair here. The chair is symbolic; it represents him for he is our emissary to earth; he’s always gone, yet always here. He issues all invitations for us. When someone accepts, he sends us his or her name so God may write it in the registration lists. We call him the H’oly Spirit.”

“Jesus,” I said puzzled, “does he have another name?”

“Ah,” he said, sometimes we say the Holy Ghost: he does seem like a ghost.”

“Oh, I thought it was the ‘Oly Ghoat!’ But now, I understand why he . . . why he let the ‘Oly Ghoat’ live.”

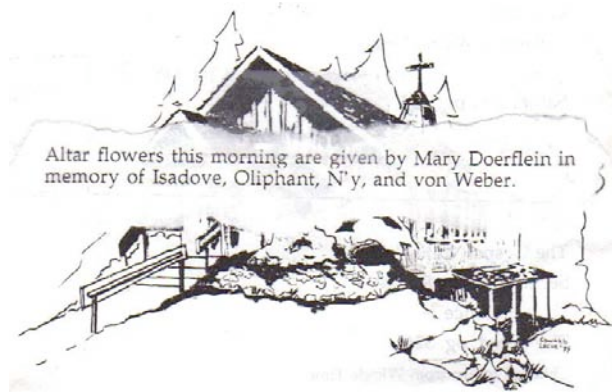
“Jesus,” I said again, “You were our sacrificial ghoat.” And I sank to my knees which were no longer knobby or stiff.

And then the radiance from the center throne rose from his chair to meet me.

“Who? are . . .” I cried. And then I felt that radiance swell up inside all my stomachs and its aura all around me. “My God,” I cried.

“Mein Gott,” said he.

*



This is a work of non-fiction. Any resemblance to any person, place or thing is purely intentional.

My Fans

Allan

Dodie Gann

Kay Kohler

Carol Spaulding

Greg, Thor, Todd and Jason Black, the four horsemen

Carl Spencer, DVS

Johannes Krieger

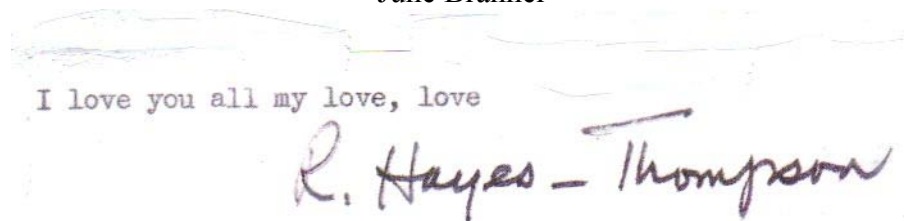
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