

WADBOROUGH FOREST

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John-John Markstedt

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PREFACE

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CONTENTS

01	Wadborough forest	1
02	Diligence	3
03	Fear	9
04	A Murder of Crows	15
05	Delight	21
06	Adherence	29
07	Sacrifice	31
08	Consolidation	33
09	Dilution	35
10	Bargain	37
11	Deceit	39
12	Departure	41

In memory of Richard Adams

“My heart has joined the Thousand, for my friend
stopped running today.”

1920 – 2016

01

WADBOROUGH FOREST

"Man selects only for his own good; Nature only for that of the being which she tends."

- Charles Darwin

The Wadborough forest is a peculiar patch of land. It's the only forest for miles and sticks out in the patchwork of farmlands surrounding the village of Wadborough. The forest was left untouched when the village was first founded many centuries ago and kept as shooting ground. Pheasants were imported and the villagers, to increase their yield, set out to remove their natural predators.

Pheasants are clumsy birds, used to roaming the Asian steppes undisturbed from predators - they had difficulty surviving in the forest of Wadborough. Over the years the villagers drove all major predators out of the region. The red fox was first to go as they seem to hunt the pheasants out of sport, killing more than they could eat. The stoat, wolverine and the mink followed shortly after. The weasels and badgers were hunted to low numbers but kept alive as

they mostly ate rodents, which consequently was booming without the predators.

Against the will of the Wadborough villagers the bill of wildlife preservation act was past in the county of Worcestershire which holds the legislative power in Wadborough. It contained many paragraphs but no one as stringent as §68.

'A person shall not hunt game birds including but not limited to the Common Pheasant, Grouse, Goose, Turkey, Duck or Pigeon by means of firearm or any form of projectiles unless bread in captivity under permission from state licensed breeder. A person guilty of an offense under this Act shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding 5.000 pound sterling.'

- §68 Bill of Wildlife Preservation Act

Although the villagers did not abide by the law in the first few years after its initial passing, they eventually followed suit after a tens of hefty fines had been past witch, to the amusement of many locals, became known as the great shooting purge of '08.

And so it came to be that the forest of Wadborough was free of both man and predator - undisturbed by the natural checks and balances that keeps the order of things.

02

DILIGENCE

"I have never made but one prayer to God, a very short one: Oh Lord, make my enemies ridiculous. And God granted it."

- Voltaire

Deep underground in the comfort of a burrow a chipmunk woke with a jerk of excitement. He had waited for this morning all spring, working many extra shifts in the tunnels and picking blueberries on the weekends. His ambitions had always been to leave the borrows and move above ground and finally he had saved up enough to do so. Chipmunks who usually enjoy their time underground and had given him the name Supram. It's short for 'Et qui super terram' from the old scriptures which loosely translates to 'He who lives above ground'.

Supram rose out of bed and rushed out from the burrow, following the runs twist and turns until it widen into a great hall. A massive network of roots intertwined along the dirt walls and ceiling, supporting the large area. Many chipmunks had already gathered there and as soon as

Supram entered a Chipmunk in the front of the hall turned against the others, facing them, and began to speak. 'Early bird freight the world' he began with a loud but calm voice.

'Early worm freight the world' the other chipmunks answered in chorus.

'So..' the he continued promptly, 'There was another collapse in tunnel F2 last night'. He let the room sit for a bit to allow for the news to sink in before he continued 'A dumwit of a pheasant went chasing a magpie and, well, it caved'

'Again!? Really!?' the largest of the few, Greenberry almost shouted. 'This must be the third time these last couple of weeks, Ripell, you've promised they would behave'

The first chipmunk, Ripell took a deep breath before he answered 'I don't know what to tell you, I've talked to the crows and they assured the pheasants would keep in their perimeters'

'I for sure won't talk to the moles again' Greenberry mustered after a few moments of silence.

The deep network of tunnels under the forest was not just the chipmunks doing. Although excellent diggers, they still stood no match against the moles who mostly dug the wider paths like F2. Moles are however not so pleasant to deal with, they're grumpy almost like toddlers and seem to hate every second of conversations they must endure.

'No I will deal with them, I'll bring Shrub'.

Shrub jerked nervously as if being suddenly woken from a dream and simply nodded in a gesture of compliance.

'As you all know, we're still in the middle of berry season. The rabbits expects us finish the celery deliveries today and the flow of berries won't stop any time soon. Chop chop, get on with it' Ripell ended.

Chipmunks are usually gatherers and known to eat seeds, nuts, berries and even grass, shoots and other plant material. With the event man leaving the forest, a sort of calmness had arose letting the animals cooperate and specialize to a greater extent. Many animals are great gatherers, but no specie is as great at carrying feed as the chipmunks. In their stretchable cheeks they may carry large quantities of feed without slowing down their speed and while other animals gathered feed, the chipmunks transported it almost like the freight industry of man. In the winter they stored food for the whole forest deep underground and rationed it to last the winter.

The chipmunks started to slowly wander out from the hall. Ever since Ripell had ended his speech he had fixated his eyes on Supram. Supram lingered, waiting for the others to leave. When the last chipmunk left the hall, Ripell took a couple of hops until he was standing right next to Supram.

'Supram' Ripell began.

'Father' Supram answered stubbornly.

'So it's true then, you're really leaving your burrow?'

'You all say it like its news, haven't I planned for this the whole summer? You if anyone knows of all my extra shifts...'

'I suppose..., I never truly believed this day would actually come, I just thought it was something you needed to get out of you system.'

'I mean, I'm the only one in the family not named after blueberries?''*

...

'What about Shrub then? He is a better planner than any of us have ever seen'

'You and I know that, but the others don't respect him. Heck he even gets pushed around even when I'm present. Even if you leave to live above ground you can still work here, think about it at least..'

'I don't know what to tell you, this is what I need to do and to do it fully. I'm sure I can manage to gather my own food, maybe it's not as efficient but I'm not looking for that.'

"Well," Ripell said at last as if he had accepted the finality of Supram's decision. 'Your always welcome back, but now you need to excuse me I've got moles to deal with'.

Ripell took the few hops left to leave the hall and disappeared around the corner leaving Supram alone in the hall. 'That could have gone way worse' thought Supram as he stood there in silence.

Supram had procured a piece of a great Silver Birch overlooking a clearing central in the forest. It was pigeon territory, but they had been easy to persuade with the many screw-nuts he'd brought. He had made an appointment with a woodpecker known as Redrill, who was to excavate a home high in the birch. They had agreed to meet when the sunshine stood in line with a tall spruce

at the entrance E3 to the tunnel network. The sun had far still to travel to that point and Supram felt at unease as one does with the prospect of the inevitable life changing event ticking closer. "I might as well get my things ready" he thought and left the hall in direction for his burrow.

*Rippel had always been mature for his age, which eventually made him head over the chipmunk operations. He had earned his 'Ripell' from 'Ripe' and 'Bell' to symbolize his maturity and bell from the bell shaped flower of the blueberry shrub. His bigger brother on the other hand had in contrast came to bear 'Greenberry' in the most opposites of meanings.

03

FEAR

"Emergencies' have always been the pretext on which the safeguards of individual liberty have eroded."

- Friedrich von Hayek

The Wadborough villagers, in a time before environmental concerns, had used the forest as a dump. Everything from electronics to cars were shattered with regular interval. At first no animal would bother with the alien contraptions, but eventually the crows grew curious and conjectured that these objects of men could teach a thing or two. When taking apart them, they lay notice to the many screw-nuts holding them together; they quickly became consumed by their beauty. Their hexagonal shape and the glimmering of steel in the sun. The screw-nuts became desired and it didn't take long until trade was exclusively in screw-nuts. Their alien form made them difficult to counterfeit and they remained scarce through generations. Many youths, seeking fortune, scavenged the forest and surrounding meadows in search for freshly dumped junk, but most came up shorthanded.

But to Kraerion they were simply a means to an end, to live where no chipmunk had lived before.

Supram had gathered his three remaining screw-nuts and was now standing still by the entrance to his burrow. Moments before he had eaten the last of his emergency rations. "God I hope I never see this damp soil ever again" he muttered to himself in silence. The sun had made its routinely voyage across the sky and was soon to pass over the great spruce. Supram took one last glance back at the burrow before he leaped into the run heading towards his new home.

When Supram peaked his head out from the run, he immediately saw Redrill who was standing there cautiously waiting in the far end of the meadow. He crawled out the hole into the meadow basking in the mid-day sun and greeted Redrill courteously. The woodpecker nodded without altering his gaze. Supram took the few hops between the two. In one swift motion the bird turned his head and uttered "You really sure 'bout this?".

"Yes" answered Supram a bit too quickly, not expecting the question "I – I've never been more sure."

Redrill chuckled amused "Don't worry, I won't argue with the hands that feed me" He said, "you brought payment, no?"

Supram nodded, turned south and said "You know where it is?"

"Sure I do" Redrill said, "I'm thorough you know."
and off they went in southern direction.

Chipmunks can quickly bolt if in danger, unthreatened however, they move slowly through the tall grass, weeds and thistle making up the forest floor. As they walk on their forepaws, their field of vision is limited and they usually stop every few steps to stand up hind legs to see their surroundings.

The odd pair traveled slowly through the thick undergrowth. As usual during noon the forest was steaming with activity. Entering a loosely dense area of mainly beech trees, they saw a robin in a heated conversation with a hedgehog.

"You can't be serious, I'm only asking for two spines..", said the robin.

"Sir, you see, we only drop a few spines a week", the hedgehog responded calmly, "and you see, there is a great demand. I could just go ask any of your neighbors."

Supram took the remaining few hops separating the two odd pairs,

"Why do you need spines, anyway", Supram said.

"Haven't you heard? The nightingales in a tree close to mine got their screw-nuts stolen from their nest yesterday. I'm making some improvement to ours so we don't become the next target.", said the robin.

"Hfm", Redrill uttered as he caught up to the group, "I heard Zrefrafal and a few others of the rabbits complain earlier this morning, apparently their burrows had been raided as well."

"Sirs, this crime wave has certainly been good for business, but strained my time. You'll have to excuse me. Either you make a purchase or you move along."

Redrill muttered some indistinguishable plesentries best unherd, untucked his wings and took off. Supram followed as best he could bound the the ground, whilst the robin gave away and finilized the deal.

The woodpecker soon landed and they continued southwards.

When they reached the clearing, they herd a loud screech from a surrounding birch tree. The sound was coming from a pigeon nest in the lower part of the canopy. Redrill hesitated for a moment and spoke, "Wait here", he again raised his wings and took off towards the sound.

The wide silver birch tree, which Supram were to call home, was only two trees away from where the sound had emerged.

Supram didn't wait. He sprung up the side of the birch following a branch running past the nest so as he could look down into the nest. Redrill was standing on a branch opposite the nest. A few other pigeons had heard the sound as well and joined all around the nest. They all had their eyes fixated on the nest and they saw a terrified mother standing over three newborn fledglings.

"They're all gone", she said at last, "all gone."

They all understood, another theft and another victim. This time a mother of three.

"I was only gone for a moment", she continued sulkily. "How will we survive the winter?"

"We should give her some room", another pidgeon suddenly said, "especially non-relatives". As he articulated

the last word his sight was hovering over Redrill. The woodpecker signaled to Supram, and the two left the tree in silence.

They regrouped under the wide silver birch when a pidgeon who had followed them appeared. Supram had not recognized him in the crowd but now he did. It was Greyhead, the landlord of these birches who Supram had bought part of the birch from.

"Excuse our rude welcome", Greyhead said, "These are strange times."

"Indeed, no need to apologize.", Supram said. "It is just for us to start chipping away then?"

"Of course, the meter above the first branch is all yours", Greyhead said, "I should probably attend the mother. You're very welcome here, if anything - you need only ask". He disappeared as swiftly as he had appeared.

"Should I begin then?", Redrill said.

"Yes, You only need to make the entrance. My teeth should be strong enough to carve out the rest of the hollow. Have it facing south, ", Kraerion said.

"Sure enough", Redrill said as he flew up to the spot slightly above the first branches and began to peck. At once Kraerion realized how Redrill had gotten his name. His red crest was incessantly moving back and forth in what appeared only as a red blur to the naked eye. Woodpeckers have not gained their ability to build shelters, but to force larvae and other arboreal out from their comfy homes. The

woodpecker of Wadborough forest had quickly learned how to apply their unusual ability for commercial interests. Many of the well-of song bird had gotten peckers nests carved for them. They may be best compared to the wooden bird-houses that have become popular for people to build and hang in their gardens, but instead of hanging on the trunk; they're built directly in the trunk itself.

Redrill worked quickly but thorough. When he was finished, Kraerion payed him the screw-nut that was promised. When the woodpecker disappeared beyond the birches, Kraerion continued to carve out the hollow with his strong teeth until the sun disappeared behind the trees. Just before he fell asleep in his new hollow, Greyhead appeared in the entrance.

"The crows have called in an emergency meeting tomorrow an noon at the old Oak. Though you ought to know.", He said before disappearing as quickly as he came.

The hollow was still rough, he had neither had the time to smoothen the wood, nor carry up moss to make a bed. It did not matter. He had finally done what he had been scared would only remain a dream. He slept deep, the sort of sleep you can only achieve with great satisfaction.

A MURDER OF CROWS

“the only thing we have to fear is fear itself. [...] I shall ask the Congress for the one remaining instrument to meet the crisis — broad Executive power to wage a war against the emergency, as great as the power that would be given to me if we were in fact invaded by a foreign foe.”

- Franklin D. Roosevelt

The murder of crows sat eerily hunched along the wast network of branches in the ever reaching crown of the old Oak tree. The animals had gathered in the glade in front of the tree. Not all animals could fit in the glade but all had some one representing them there with a few exceptions. Some of the smaller rodents and moles who barely spoke the common language. The pheasants were not there either, as they barely could comprehend the ground in front of them any conclusion would pass over their heads anyway. The song birds had found comfortable twigs in the elms surrounding the glade. Supram clung among the birds and he had noticed Ripell standing with a hare near the rabbits. They were the only two chipmunks present. A few laggards arrived one after another and with the arrival

of a large buck, known to speak on behalf of the deers, the meeting could start.

One of the crows took a few deliberate steps far out on an oak branch, so as he became visible for all in the meadow. The crow was named Eaglewing, for he had a discoloured right wing flashing of light brown like a white-tailed eagle. No one in the forest had ever seen an eagle, but stories of the mighty creature had been past down through generations.

"Craax", Eaglewing began to remark his intention to start the meeting, "We all know of whats transpired, prompting us this vital gathering. A few of us, good and decent animals, have gotten their screw-nuts stolen from otherwise secure dens and burrows. Theft, as I might remark, is unprecedented in our short history since man left us alone and the founding of this council and forest law." He spoke with a dark solemn tone, pacing himself to give weight to his words.

"Nonetheless, these recent events will require us to act, and to act swiftly we must to insure our continued safety which we have had to privilege off for so very long. We have a suggested recourse which we, if no one objects, are willing to implement. The geniality of this plan however, I cannot take any credit for, so its best to leave the branch to our dear Vlahir." He unfolded his wings, showing his strong and wide wingspan of black and brown. Thrusting his wings he flew off to a neighboring branch slightly high in the Oak. Vladhir, a smaller and young crow, made his way out on the branch where Eaglewing previously stood.

"See, the problem stems from the screw-nuts themselves", Vladhir said, he spoke hastily with a twitchy, irregular pitch very unlike that of Eaglewing. If one did not know of his incredible ingenuity, which had come to be expected in the forest, one could get the impression that he was nervous. "The screw-nuts is terribly fungible, there is no way to tell them apart..." He paused, as if he had said something significant.

"What do you mean?" Zrefrafal, one of the rabbits, asked at last. Some of the other animals nodded in agreement with the question.

"Don't you see? We can't tell them all apart. We have no recourse against the thief..." Vladir abruptly paused again.

"So..." asked the Buck, growing weary of this indirect explanation.

"If we were to mark the and trace the ownership of each screw-nut" He continued, "and if anyone were to be stolen we simply tell everyone and if someone then tries to trade with stolen nut we know of his guilt" As Vladhir paused for the third time, Eaglewing had enough and flew down to the ground and standing in the middle of the glade and continued

"There is no way to mark the screw-nuts themselves, we've tried. But we have experimented with leaves and we're certain we can mark them distinguishably. Its just a

matter of replacing the screw-nuts with these new marked leaves."

"I don't believe I need to remind you all that leaves rot", a voice from the far end of the glade uttered. It belonged to Aesop, the lone badger. He was a recluse that smelled of rot and disease and naturally all the others avoided him. Most badgers had been killed by men long ago, but Aesop's lineage had survived on paranoia alone.

"No, you don't.", Eaglewing responded slightly irritated, "We've conducted some experiments since the outbreak. It turns out that silk worms can add a thin transparent hue around the leaf making it robust against both wear and rot."

"And we all should just trust you crows to handle this nuisance for us then?", Aesop said amused. He had moved to the center of the glade. "The screw-nuts have a proven track record. They have certain unique irreplaceable qualities and are fairly distributed.

"Well, it's only temporary, when the crimes are over we'll return to the screw-nuts.", Eaglewing said, "Besides, the leaves will be redeemed one-to-one so distribution and function will remain exactly the same."

"Where shall the screw-nuts be held? Gathering all the our wealth in one place is a sure road to disaster. To whom shall the burden of guard fall?"

"It's actually good that you brought that up. A few of the crows and I flew over the neighboring meadows just yesterday. We were curious to discover a litter of stoats, abandon by their mother. They are only blind kittens now, so we'll be able to raise them properly."

"Stoats?!", Zrafrfal cried, his voice carrying a slight tremble, "I must be mistaken, did you say stoats?"

"Yes, you heard correct and like I said we'll raise them properly.", Eaglewing repeated, "I assure you, no rabbit or any other animal for that matter will be hurt by the stoats we raise"

"You all gone mad!", Aesop said as he stormed off, "I will have no part in this."

"Any other objections?", Eaglewing said with a smug smile, "Any with actual merit?"

The glade was silent, most did not know what to believe and fewer what to do. The rabbits and other smaller prey, born with an innate dread of stoats similar to how human children are afraid of snakes, could not help but express fear in their faces.

"I don't like this" Zrafrfal thought to himself "the crows have been trustworthy, I have no ground to stand on. No reason with which to object."

The glade remained silent. While Zrafrfal grasped for a reasonable objection; the moment passed.

"Good" Eaglewing concluded, "Let's meet here in a week and make the replacement."

05

DELIGHT

“If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music he hears, however measured or far away.”

- Henry David Thoreau

The sun slowly rose in the eastern sky and innocent rays of morning light trickled through the dense forest canopy. The sparse beams reaching for the undergrowth, fighting off the morning mist like a potent antidote. The daily struggle between dew and vapor began anew. Supram sat awake in his hollow, hunched on his forepaws, gazing contently out on the morning landscape. He had woke, like most mornings to the varied orchestra of nightingales and blackbirds tirelessly competing for the vibration of the humid air. The beautiful song was now and again broken by the distinct cooing of a neighboring wood pigeon. Gone were the days of rising before the sun; he enjoyed his morning routine.

Supram had managed well without the reliable feed from transporting goods and although it took longer for

him to gather all the necessary feed himself; he found himself enjoying the process. Efficiency had not been his reason for moving.

The swap over to leaves had happened as planned one week after the meeting. The whole forest had gathered in a long line, and all things considered, it had gone well with only a couple scraps. Pray animals are usually very risk averse and always like to have an escape route and tend to be quite unpredictable in numbers. Supram had waited in a nearby tree to avoid the tumult and only entered the line when most animals had left. He kept his stack of fresh leaves in the back of his hollow. The theft had stopped immediately after the switch had taken place and the crows had received much praise for their ingenuity.

A sound of scratched bark broke his thoughts, he leaned his head out through the hollow. He saw a familiar shape standing at the foot of the birch. He ran down the trunk and stopped a rough meter from the ground with his head facing the ground similar to a nuthatch.

"You never said goodbye", she said. Her words sparked a deep feeling of guilt in Kraerion. They were born the same spring and had grown up together. They had been inseparable.

"I didn't know what to say", he replied. She was not entirely pleased with his answer, but stayed silent.

"I'm sorry, I really wanted to say something. I could barely convince myself to leave, seeing you would have

made it so much harder", he continued, grasping for anything to change the subject. "Do you want to take a wander?"

There is a great difference between walking and wandering. To walk, is to have a purpose in mind. A destination to reach, a route to be taken. To wander however, is the purpose itself. For the simple pure joy of just wandering about. It may be said that there are two kinds of animals in this world; those who walk and those who wander. Kraerion belongs to the latter group, which separated him fundamentally from his chipmunk origins. A commune raised on logistics - to move goods under the forest, to do it on schedule and with efficiency.

Kraerion expected to be scolded again, as Cinnamon was clever and would take notice of his choice of words. Instead, to his surprise, she answered him with a short "Okey, sure!". He jumped the last meter down to the ground. They set off east, at a leisurely pace.

"You smell different", Cinnamon said after a short while.

"I do?", Kraerion said, "Must be those damn pigeons, passing droppings like its art.". He said it jokingly, as if they hadn't been apart.

"You are never coming back, are you?", she said as she stopped, with her black chipmunk eyes glaring right through him.

"No", he said staunchly after some thought, "I don't think I ever will."

They continued in silence, seemingly exhausted by their situation. They were wandering past the old oak. Kraerion did not recognize it at first as he had only seen the glade when it was full with animals. The oak was under heavy construction, it swarmed with woodpeckers, rabbits and seemingly every carpenter up for hire. Even a roebuck was there dragging in materials. A few crows was spread out, directing the whole spectacle. A few paces from behind the oak stood Vlahir. The crows were standing in the middle of a semi-circle, consumed in deep thought. Next to him, in the exact middle, stood a straight stick perpendicular to the ground. The stick casted a long shadow in the morning sun. He looked up as the chipmunks approached him.

"Good morning", Vlahir said lightly. He was clearly in a good mood.

"Morning", Kraerion responded, "What are the stones for?"

"The sun runs in it's eternal circuit the Lord has given her. She does so alone, never able to befriend the moon half a day away. Her pace is beyond our world, too distant for us to comprehend; yet she passes the trees with a precision no mortal can ever rival. She is the measure of our days."

He stopped to catch his breath before he continued.

"But the trees she lapses are firmly caught in place, animals raised in different glades, may not share their names. Just as she is, she treats them true - so the shadows they cast are thusly the same."

"Wait, you mean the stones tell the suns position?", proclaimed Cinnamon.

"Yes, the sun rise in the east and the shadow will fall over the westernmost stone here", Vlahir said as he pointed at the first stone. "The shadow will then walk across the stones. If we align the semi-circle after the stars, we may be able to build multiple constructions at the same angel. It's not bounded to a singular position."

"So we could have duplicate structures all over the forest! It would be easier to coordinate, it would even be possible among strangers.", Cinnamon said to show she understood.

"Coordination is important, as I'm sure you chipmunks understand", Vlahir said, hinting at their vocation, "But not what we crows are interested in. The fruits of labor are really a function of time, if we cannot measure time - we cannot know where to spend it."

Vlahir pointed his wing at the rocks, "The time for the shadow to travel between the first and second takes as long time to travel from the second to the third. We may say that harvesting a stones worth of blueberries takes

two rocks and three pebbles worth of time, but during two rocks and three pebbles you could harvest as much as two stones of cranberries. When you see labor as a cost function of time, only then will you know what to prefer."

The English count time in base 60, as that was how the Babylonians had their numeric systems. When realized that fingers made a better tool for the task of numbers, time remained in base 60. Intentions and reason long forgotten, yet here it remains inert. Now is but the cumulative residue of legacy - forever parading the power of inertia. Vlahir had placed five stones and three peddles between each. Not due to any particular reason or conviction, it had to be denoted in something. Generations past would be burden by his conjectures, to learn the meaning of shadows and stones.

Kraerion had stopped listening, he did neither understand nor share their excitement. He instead watched the Oak intently, grasping the massive ongoing construction. In that moment he truly admired the crows, "what a disciplined bunch" he thought, "able to save for so long as to afford such a vast project."

Cinnamon and Vlahir had finally exhausted their conversation and Cinnamon urged Kraerion to continue their wander. They began heading back, but not the way they came. Instead they went in a circle; catching different glades on their retinas. They did not talk, but there was comfort in the silence. Both of them knew that the feeling was mutual.

"Kraerion, I'm worried", she said suddenly, "It seem

to me like we've worked more this year than we ever have before, but Shrub is very worried. He says again and again that food is short. I think he's having a nervous breakdown."

"You know how shrub is, or you ought to by now. He's always concerned, even with his own shadow."

"It's not only him though. Even I have less food saved for this winter, and you know how I am, or you ought to. I've always been frugal, always been more scared of winter than drawn to immediate pleasure. I don't know. I've earned more this season than any other, yet somehow it buys me less food. We haven't had any drought or any good reason for diminishing supply. Am I making any sense?"

"To be honest, I've never thought about much since I moved out. What does Ripell say?"

"He just parrots the crows, Eaglewing told him personally not to worry and that everything is fine. He seems to believe them, but I'm not so sure."

"The crows have been right before?", Kraerion said a bit reluctant, "haven't they?"

"I know", Cinnamon said quietly, "But I can't shake the feeling that something is terribly wrong. I just don't know what."

They reached the birch Kraerion had made his home, they said farewell. As Cinnamon disappeared among the trees so too did the sun. He thought with a smile, "The sun is bound for eternal returns, so too will Cinnamon - whatever glade or burrow, she would return.". He looked forward to their next meeting and wondered if 'eternal' existed in their world.

ADHERENCE

"The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting."

- Milan Kundera

There had long been a custom for the animals to hold an annual meeting the day after the first frost. A moment to finalize the winter preparations, before activity contracted to survival speeds. The autumn colours of fire had fallen from the trees and only rotten leaves remained, like ash, to tell of its tales. The nights grew longer and colder; eventually frost was inevitable. The forest had prospered since the time of men, but winter was still winter - the unprepared would not live to see the spring.

"Craax", Eaglewing cried tiredly, "You're next Snowball"

"Hrm", Snowball uttered as he took a step forward. He looked anything like a snowball, still wearing his brown coat. His beauty was concealed and dormant, but in the next few weeks his fur would transform into a magnificent white coat, the sort of white whom even the snow were jealous of. "Our burrows are filled to the brim with hay.

But you all know us, we'll manage to scavenge for food even in the thickest of snow. Our warren will be safe this winter."

Eaglewing seemed content with his answered and continued by calling up the next speaker.

Unlike the emergency meeting regarding theft the meeting of the first frost followed a dull routine.

Ultimately the animals were individuals against the winter, but their sovereignty ranged over a broad spectrum. On one extreme stood the rabbits who slept in the same hill, pooled digging labor and grazed in large numbers. So only Zefrafal was called upon to speak on the warrens behalf. On the other end were the roebucks who would almost beat each other to death if met during the wrong time of the year. Every single buck were thus called upon to speak. A task both time consuming and rather pointless as bucks were more concerned with boasting their zeal than reveal any concern about shortages. The rest of species fell in between the two.

The sun was about to set when only one speaker remained, save for the crows themselves of course. Most animals had stopped listening long ago

"Craax", Eaglewing concluded, "Another prosperous yield. Before we part ways I would like to make a final remark regarding the –"

"I think you're forgetting something", Aseop cried as he slowly moved from the outskirts of the glade to its very center. His smell of rot and death made the stomachs of those whom he passed turn.

"Oh no, I don't think I do.", Eaglewing said giving of a sly smile, "Please enlighten us."

"Quit the theater Eaglewing, you god damn know what I'm referring to."

"I do?!", Eaglewing said amused. He owned the air and he knew it, so he let tension build before he answer, "I'm sorry to disappoint you, but you'll have to be more specific."

"So it's theater then, huh, I'll give theater if that's what you want.", Aesop cried loudly. He crawled up on large rock next to the oak as to be in height with Eaglewing, but instead of facing Eaglewing he turned and faced Zefrafal. "I hold Zefrafal to be honest and known to speak true, if you agree say aye."

A low murmur of ayes filled the glade, it appeared to be unanimous.

"Thank you", Aesop continued, "Zefrafal, is it not true "

Once again the herd of animals found themselves perched up under the old oak, waiting for the crows .

"Craax", Eaglewing uttered and the glade fell in silence. "Welcome to the annual "

"I believe you're forgetting something", a voice from the far end of the glade uttered. It belonged to Aesop the badger. He moved closer to the center,³

SACRIFICE

“In man’s struggle against the world, bet on the world.”

- Franz Kafka

The winter came early and hard. Most of the song birds had long migrated south, but the pigeons made up for it with their incessant cooing. The forest bed was covered in about five inches of snow and most animals were in their burrows and nests trying to preserve their body heat. Kraerion had insulated his hollow, the inner walls was meticulously covered with moss and lichen. Redrill had carved a round wooden piece, which could be rolled in front of the entrance to keep the warmth from escaping.

In the mornings though, he pushed the piece aside. He preferred his view of the glade over warmth. He had watched the morning dew slowly been turned to frost. The years before he had been underground and not realized that they were but two different sides of the same coin.

Suddenly Cinnamon appear in the glade like she had done that late summer morning. This time she didn’t stop at the foot of the birch, rather she raced up trunk with a

fury not to her character. When she reached the hollow she was completely out of breath, grasping for air - Kraerion did not need to hear her speak, he saw in her pearl black eyes that she bore grave news. She knew there was no point in delaying the inevitable, so when she caught breath she uttered solemnly

"Shrub is dead", with a slight shiver in her voice. / so she added, "I think you better come"

08

CONSOLIDATION

"Civilization is a hopeless race to discover remedies for the evils it produces."

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Value is subjective, but value itself fulfill a remarkable function in trade. For most value is but

09

DILUTION

"The long run is a misleading guide to current affairs. In the long run we are all dead."

- John Maynard Keynes

"Our forest is but a puddle; still and unproductive", Vlahir began, "It's known that puddles and otherwise still water carries disease. We shan't drink it. We shall however drink from the brooks, where the current has brought life and fortune. Our forest is but a puddle; if it remains a puddle - we all be dead come winter."

Vlahir looked around the glade, his curious eyes wandering. Vlahir truly loved an audience in dispense.

"Each of us are the droplets that makes the puddle. Our actions, its current. There is natural ebbs and flows of course, but sometimes it gets stuck still in ebb. Low demand for goods leads to fewer trades and subsequently fewer jobs. Fewer jobs in turn leads to fewer leaves to spend, further damaging demand. A maelstrom of disease if you will."

The glade was in complete silence now, only a few could grasp the true meaning of his words. Even fewer had any wits to contest it.

"Analogies are these precious little things, tender and digestible with reality abstracted, to afford even the dullest of minds some comprehension. Solve the puddle and our economy is saved."

"It's the current that is the answer. A great stimulus. We need spending, we need demand and we need jobs. We will give you that." said Vlahir as he ended his speech. He left the branch and made room for Eaglewing.

Eaglewing stepped forward again. "Craax", he cried, "Through diligent consideration, we've decided to implement a set of policies to stimulate our economy. To increase demand and subsequently create jobs."

10

BARGAIN

(Create more jobs)

11

DECEIT

“For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.”

- Gospel of Matthew 13:12

12

DEPARTURE

“Hell is truth seen too late.”

- Thomas Hobbes

The winter was mild, yet the animals died like fly larvae in dried puddles. One could believe the forest was interlocked in a civil war with many casualties on both sides. The war however, was one against nutrition and cold.

Starvation is worse than war. In war it is the able, the strong and the fierce, that die. They oft do so in a noble cause - if the cause is just and victorious the history may even smile at them, etching their names into vast stone memorials.

Starvation is another beast entirely, it's the weak that fall first - the kittens, fawns and the newly hatched and spawned - the elders and wise, the crooked and hurt. The loving old wise doe after a long fulfilled life; dies but in agony without so much as dignity left in her soul. The starved follow Dylan Thomas's advice, they truly 'Do not go gentle into that good night'. They go in extravagant

desperation, searching(raging) for the light. Howling in pain for all the burrow to hear. In the beginning they may receive empathy for their pains, but when they die they've long drained their kin dry and only spite remains.

Kraerion, al last his fathers son, had taken his responsibilities to heart. He had lead the chipmunks daily work for almost a year. They had worked hard he thought to himself. "Not hard enough", his own thoughts hurt him more than any conceivable torture ever could.

(Initiative)

He narrow run widened under the support of the roots of the old oak. He stopped, he heard laughter in the distance - but that was not why he stopped. The hollows between the roots were filled with large heaps of food. Piles of mushrooms, berries and nuts. There was even dried berries, conserved and safe from rot - which he had never seen before. He moved between the heaps, still grasping the extravagant wealth - fighting the dissonance in his mind. "Surely my men must have passed here many times", the thought to himself not . He passed the heap with the screw-nuts. It looked like a mountain next the Chipmunks now meager body shape. Next to the heap stood a stack of freshly laced leaves.

He heard laughter again. He moved passed into what may only be described as a room. The damp walls and floor were covered with flat stones, laid meticulously. Large wooden beams held up the ceiling and through a few holes; light slipped into the room. In the middle of the room a large wooden table full of carved details. All around the table sat crows feasting and laughing. Along the wall hang,

what a human might call art - but to Kraerion it didn't look like anything. At the edge of the table, Eaglewing sat. He looked up and saw Kraerion standing in the entrance.

"Craax", he cried pointing his brown wing in the air. "I wondered when you would join us.", when Kraerion did not reply he continued, ""

"Did you really believe we wouldn't wield the power given to us,"

Kraerion finally understood. The hunger he had suppressed for so long roared at him from within. He stumbled, as if he was intoxicated, and the crows roared with laughter. The realization utterly broken him. He sought the path away from the room, but he could barely manage to stand on his feet.

He had remained strong when his brother died. He had remained strong when his litter starved to death. When Cinnamon lost her laughter, he had carried on. He had sacrificed his dreams for duty and honor. It had all been for naught. The long suppressed grief came to him at once, carving him to the bones.

Sunlight appeared before him, the end of the run. He tumbled outside into snow, into the cold white landscape. He weakened and laid down. As he stared up at the sun for the last time he thought solemnly.

"What is strength? I don't know anymore. I did my duty, I lived what was right and I worked harder than anyone. Yet all I love is dead."

He knew that he was a fool, but he did not understand why or how. He also knew that no chipmunk, no rabbit nor any roe could grasp the depths of the scheme of the

murderous crows nor have the ability to halt it.

"What ought to be right and true could not have been. I thought working was right, when making right was there all along."

The cold caught his heart still. He had had his last thought.

He had remained oblivious during the discourse, knowing he didn't understand and accepted it. He had not made it his duty to understand, to fend for his interests. He had believed their intentions, yet been blind to their cause. He had naively toiled, sacrificed himself for all he held dear, for all animal kind.

The stark ways he had lead his life - had been nothing but folly. He had been proud for what he represented, he had worked hard and done what ought to be right.

DEPARTURE

THE END

Hill introduction Man left land
Chipmunk bought birth real estate
Tink
Meets woodpecker start work on the vila Sleep in non
silk interior
Meeting Chief crow Eaglewing murder of crows
Wadborough heights little forest
Chipmunk
Woodpecker red crest
Crow Eaglewing Vlahir Zrefrafal
Ujelnach Prephix Kraerion
Supram