



STUDENT WRITING PORTFOLIO

FILE BOX SOURCE TEXTS



File Box Source Texts

Level A

Blackline Masters

First Edition, February 2014
Institute for Excellence in Writing, L.L.C.

Copyright Policy

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Level A

First Edition, February 2014

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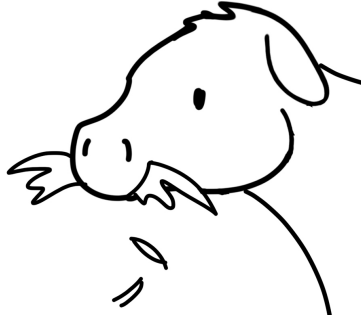
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Although a reading grade level score is provided for each of the sources provided, these ratings do not always portray an accurate assessment of a student's reading ability. Reading scores are derived from a formula that weighs vocabulary, sentence structure, word repetition, and sentence length. True reading comprehension depends as much on a student's experience, prior knowledge, and interest in the subject as it does on vocabulary and sentence structure. With direct instruction, these texts can be suitable for use at many grade levels.

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Cattle Ranchers

A cattle rancher must check his cows every day. He watches as they move about. He checks the water supply. He counts them. If flies pester them, he puts a fly tag on their ear. He calls a vet when they are sick. He likes to see the calves on their feet. Ranchers enjoy looking after their cows.



Rocks

Rocks are found everywhere. They are easy to collect. Smooth rocks can be found along the beach. Rocks are polished by sand and water on a beach. Mountain rocks can be sharp. Some rocks are valuable.

Diamonds are the hardest rocks. Jewelry is often made from precious stones. Sand is just ground up rock.



Clubs

It is fun to be part of a club. Some children join 4H. Scouts and Beavers are clubs for boys. Girls join Guides and Brownies. Many churches have Awana clubs. Children in clubs learn many things. Sometimes children do projects or win badges. Parents help out with clubs. They like their children to have fun.



Piano Lessons

A piano is found in many homes. Many children want to learn how to play an instrument. They go to teachers for lessons. Some think that learning piano is easy. Others think it is hard. To learn piano children must practice. Practicing every day is the best way. Someday they will be able to play any song. That is fun!



Lodgepole Pine

The lodgepole pine is a unique tree of North America. It is an evergreen tree. Indians used it to make tipi poles. Lodgepoles are perfectly straight. They can grow to be over one hundred years old. Lodgepole pinecones are very hard. Forest fires open the cones and seeds fall out. New trees will grow. Today many lodgepole pine forests are protected. They are a very useful tree.



Growing a Garden

Many people enjoy gardening. They often grow vegetables to eat. Pretty flowers are fun to grow. Some gardens called orchards have fruit trees. People all over the world have gardens. Even city people may have small ones. It is fun to watch the plants grow. A garden provides fun, food, and exercise.



Rodeo

Cowboys and cowgirls perform in rodeos. They compete in many contests. There are chuck wagon races. Girls ride horses and race around barrels. Cowboys try to lasso calves. Bull riding is a dangerous sport. Steer wrestling takes strong arms. Cowboys and cowgirls can win trophies and prizes. Rodeos are very popular in the West.



Hockey

Hockey is Canada's national sport. Players wear ice skates and carry a stick to push a puck around an arena. They try to get the puck into their opponent's goal. Millions of Canadians love hockey. Boys and girls practice hockey and start practicing when they are very young. They must become good ice skaters to play hockey. Hockey players also wear protective clothing so they do not get hurt. Some professional hockey players make a lot of money. Many people enjoy Canada's national sport.



Australia

Australia is called “the land down under.” It is surrounded by the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The smallest continent in the world is Australia. It has many very interesting animals like kangaroos and koalas. Unusual plants also grow there. A large desert covers the most of the interior. Beaches lie around the exterior. Tourists enjoy its many attractions. Australia is in the Southern Hemisphere, or “down under” the equator.

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Little Red Hen

For Little Red Hen and her chicks, life on the old farm was simple. Peacefully they lived together with Dog and Cat. Those two rarely helped when chore time came, however. Planning to make bread, Little Red Hen wished she could have some help.

With her pail full of seeds, Little Red Hen headed for the field. Dog was sleeping and dreaming in the road just then. He woke up. She asked him if he would help plant the tiny seeds. “Not I,” replied Dog. He yawned and soon went back to sleep. Eventually, autumn came. Little Red Hen happily walked to the field. There she met Cat who was licking her paws. When asked to help harvest the wheat, Cat refused. “Not I,” she said. And she swished her fluffy tail. Little Red Hen eagerly bundled the wheat. Then she carried it to the mill where the miller ground it into fine flour. Bringing this back to her kitchen, Little Red Hen bumped into Dog and Cat again. Politely she asked them to help her bake the bread. Again Dog and Cat, who were a little lazy if you ask me, both replied, “Not I.”

Well, by this time Little Red Hen was used to doing all the work by herself, so she began to bake. In a jiffy, the breeze carried the delicious smell toward Dog and Cat. “Who will help me eat the bread?” called Little Red Hen. You guessed it, Dog and Cat volunteered. Little Red Hen announced that any friends could eat—who had helped. Then she fed her young chicks. Dog and cat drooled. The chicks thought it was absolutely the best bread they had ever tasted. When she heard this, Little Red Hen clucked and smiled.

Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox
An American Tall Tale

One winter in the North Woods of Minnesota, it was so cold that all the geese flew backwards. The fish moved south. Even the snow turned blue. During this Winter of the Blue Snow, Paul Bunyan—who was taller than the trees and stronger than any man alive—went walking in the woods. He heard a funny sound, and when he looked down, Paul found a baby ox. He was almost blue from the cold. So Paul took him near the fire. Although the little fellow dried out and fluffed up, he stayed blue. Paul Bunyan named him Babe. Quickly they became best friends, and Babe the Blue Ox grew up to be as tall as Paul.

Tragedy in the Graveyard

Abridged from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, by Mark Twain (1876)

“Hello, Huckleberry Finn!” called Tom.

“Hello, yourself, and see how you like it,” called Huckleberry Finn.

“What’s that you got?”

“Dead cat.”

“Lemme see him, Huck. My, he’s pretty stiff. Say—what is dead cats good for?”

“Good for? Cure warts with. Why, you take your cat and go and get in the graveyard ‘long about midnight when somebody that was wicked has been buried; and maybe a devil or two will come; and when they’re taking that feller away, you heave your cat after ‘em and say, ‘Devil follow corpse, cat follow devil, warts follow cat, I’m done with ye!’”

“No! Is that so? Lemme go with you?”

“Of course, if you ain’t afeard.”

“Afeard! Tain’t likely. Will you meow?”

That night about eleven, Tom did hear Huck meow; then he climbed out his bedroom window onto the roof of the woodshed and thence to the ground. At the end of half an hour they were wading through the tall grass of the graveyard. A faint wind moaned through the trees. The boys found the sharp new grave they were seeking, and ensconced themselves within the protection of three great elms that grew within a few feet of the grave. Then some vague figures approached through the gloom, swinging an old-fashioned tin lantern. Presently Huck whispered:

“One of ‘em is old Muff Potter. Drunk, the same as usual, likely.”

“Say, Huck, I know another o’ them voices; it’s Injun Joe.”

“That’s so—that murderin’ half-breed! What kin they be up to?”

“Here it is,” said one of the men; then he held up the lantern. It was young Dr. Robinson.

Potter and Injun Joe were carrying a handbarrow with a rope and a couple of shovels in it. They cast down their load and began to open the grave.

“Hurry, men!” the doctor said in a low voice; “The moon might come out at any moment.”

They growled a response, and within a minute or two, they got out the body and dumped it rudely on the ground. As the moon drifted from behind the clouds, they placed the body on the barrow, covered it with a blanket, and bound it to its place with the rope. Potter took out a large springknife, cut off the dangling end, and then said:

“Now the cussed thing’s ready, Doc, and you’ll just out with another five dollars.”

“That’s the talk!” said Injun Joe.

“Look here, what does this mean?” said the doctor. “You required your pay in advance, and I’ve paid you.”

“Yes, and you done more than that,” said Injun Joe, approaching the doctor. “Five years ago you drove me away from your father’s kitchen one night, when I come to ask for something to eat; and when I swore I’d get even with you if it took a hundred years, your father had me jailed for a vagrant. Did you think I’d forget? You got to settle, you know!”

He was threatening the doctor, with his fist in his face, by this time. The doctor struck out suddenly and knocked the ruffian on the ground. Potter dropped his knife, and exclaimed:

“Here, now, don’t you hit my partner!” And the next moment he and the doctor were struggling. Injun Joe sprang to his feet, his eyes flaming. He snatched up Potter’s knife, and went creeping, catlike and stooping, round and round about the fighting men, seeking an opportunity. All at once the doctor flung himself free, seized a shovel, and felled Potter to the earth with it—and in the same instant the half-breed saw his chance and drove the knife to the hilt in the young man’s chest. He reeled and fell partly upon Potter, and in the same moment the clouds blotted out the dreadful spectacle. The two frightened boys went speeding away in the dark.

Presently, when the moon emerged again, Injun Joe was standing over the two forms. He put the fatal knife in Potter’s open right hand, and sat down on the coffin. Three—four—five minutes passed, and then Potter began to stir and moan. His hand closed upon the knife; he raised it, and let it fall, with a shudder. Then he sat up, pushing the body from him, and gazed at it, and then around him, confused. His eyes met Joe’s.

“It is a dirty business,” said Joe, without moving. “What did you do it for?”

John Henry

From an African American Folk Ballad (1927)

When John Henry was born, even the sun came out to see him. And his mama knew for sure—John Henry would be a mighty man someday. Come the time to leave his family, his daddy said, “Son, you’ll need these out in the wide world.” And he gave him two thirty-pound sledgehammers with twelve-foot handles. John Henry headed for West Virginia.

Now there was a mountain smack dab in front of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad. But the boss had a solution. Called a steam drill—that would punch right through that mountain—the new machine arrived. John Henry suggested a contest, however. “Your steam drill against me and my hammers. Whoever gets to the middle first is the winner.” The next morning, the sun rose early to watch. The steam drill was on one side of the mountain, and John Henry was on the other. He swung his thirty-pound hammers so hard, flames burst out with each blow. The boss on the other side thought it was an earthquake!

The machine and John Henry worked all night, and at sunrise they met. John Henry had dug fifteen feet. The steam drill had only gone nine. Folks stood by and clapped loudly. Then John Henry laid down his hammers and died. He had swung so hard and so long, his heart broke. The sun shed tears that day. They put John Henry on a flatbed railroad car and took him home. All the people cheered as he went by, “John Henry! John Henry!”

Attaboy

The small boy Charlie loved his dog Attaboy. Every day after school they played fetch. “Good dog, Attaboy,” Charlie always told him as he gently brushed his long fur coat. But Attaboy did not listen. He wanted more fun in his life. So he ran away. Attaboy ate out of trashcans and chased cats. He dug holes in peoples’ gardens. Attaboy made friends with muddy, stray dogs. Swiftly the warm fall days turned to winter days, however. He got sick from eating garbage, and the cats had scratched up his nose. Attaboy’s friends left town. He felt lonely. Then Attaboy spied an old poster on a telephone pole. It had his picture on it! Charlie was looking for him! Oh, why had he run away from the boy who loved him? Attaboy was sorry that he had been ungrateful. Then he heard it—“Aaataboyy!” It was Charlie! Charlie raced to Attaboy and hugged him joyfully. When they got home Charlie gave Attaboy food and water in his favorite bowls. They played fetch, and Charlie brushed him. That night Attaboy fell asleep in his house thinking, “I’m such a lucky dog.”

Christopher's Stories

Christopher found a young koala at his door one fine summer day. The koala looked sad, Christopher thought. So he decided to take it to its home. He asked the birds if they knew what trees he lived in, but they did not. The next day Christopher learned that koalas come from Australia. So he built a rowboat. Then they packed and rowed out to sea. While they rowed south, Christopher told many stories to the koala, who was a polite listener. Finally they made it to Australia, where Christopher dropped off the koala. Feeling sad, both of them waved goodbye. But this just did not feel right to Christopher. What if the koala could not find his family? Who would tell him stories? Christopher rowed back to Australia. In the distance he saw the koala, exactly where he had left him. They waved hello. And all the way back to his house, Christopher told wonderful stories to his friend.

The Elves and the Shoemaker

Adapted from the Brothers Grimm (1812)

A long time ago there was a shoemaker who was very poor. He had just enough leather to make one pair of shoes. After cutting out the shoes late one night the shoemaker laid them out so he could work on them in the morning. Then when he got up, he went to his workshop. The shoes were made and finished. How had this happened, he and his wife wondered. They were beautifully stitched, too. In fact a customer bought them at a high price. So the shoemaker used the money to buy leather for two more pairs of shoes. As he had done the night before, he cut them, laid them out, and went to bed. When he came to his workshop the next morning, there they were—finely made and finished. And a customer again paid a high price for both pairs. Now the little old man used the money to buy leather for four pairs. This went on for weeks, and soon the happy shoemaker was making a fine living.

One night he asked his wife how they could find out who was making the wonderful shoes. Quickly deciding, they left a candle burning and hid in a corner behind the coats. At midnight two tiny, naked elves hopped in, and in a twinkle they finished all the shoes which had been laid out. Then they ran away. How amused and grateful the shoemaker and his wife were.

Wishing to thank the skillful elves for their generosity, the shoemaker and his wife chatted. The kind old woman thought the elves must be chilly with nothing to cover them, so she proceeded to sew little shirts, pants, and vests for them. “Now I’ll knit their socks. And you can make their shoes,” she told her husband. Then they laid out the clothes instead of the cutout leather. From their hiding place they watched as the elves hopped in and saw their gifts. Standing for a moment in surprise, they put on the garments. Then they merrily sang, “What fine and handsome lads are we. No longer will we cobblers be!” And they danced out. The tiny elves never returned, but the shoemaker and his wife lived happily ever after.

The Tiger and the Hunter

by Aesop

A hunter was so skilled that he killed many wild animals who lived in his woods. The rest of the animals hid in fear. Finally the tiger built up his courage and told the others that he alone would face the hunter. He would stop him from killing. As the tiger spoke, he became angry and showed his sharp teeth. Sneaking up from behind silently, the hunter shot an arrow at the tiger. The wild cat roared in pain and cried, "I was a fool! I should have respected the skill of my enemy."

Moral: Pride goes before a fall.

The City Rat and the Country Rat

by Aesop

Not long ago, a city rat visited his friend the country rat, with whom he grew up. Delighted to see his friend again, the country rat served him a meal. When they had finished eating some old cheese and an apple core, the city rat complained about country rat's home, which was just a hole in the ground. "Come with me to the city, where life is easy," said the city rat. So the country rat went to a large house in the city. They had just settled down in a warm room with a thick carpet, when the owner came in. Quickly the two rats had to scurry away. "If this is your town life," the country rat said, "I would rather live in peace in the fields." And he went back to his hole in the country.

Moral: Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home.

The Raven and the Snake

by Aesop

A hungry raven observed a snake which was basking in the sun. “Now I shall have some lunch,” thought the raven. Swooping down, the raven seized the snake in his beak and tried to fly to a place where he could eat peacefully. In his pain the snake twisted, turned, and tightly wrapped himself around the raven. Then the snake bit the raven with his poisonous fangs. Mortally wounded, the dying raven confessed that he deserved punishment. He had tried to satisfy himself at the cost of the snake’s welfare. He died in no time.

Moral: You cannot succeed at another’s expense.

Homer and the Donuts

Adapted from *Homer Price*, by Robert McCloskey (1949)

It was Friday in the peaceful little town of Centerburg. Homer was having lunch in his Uncle Ulysses' diner, where Homer sometimes worked. Having a weakness for laborsaving devices, his Uncle Ulysses had recently purchased an automatic donut machine.

"Homer," said Uncle Ulysses, "I'm going across to the barber shop for a spell. Mind the diner. Oh, and please mix up a batch of donut batter and put it in the machine. We'll need lots of donuts when the movie lets out."

As Homer got out the ingredients for the batter, a shiny black limousine stopped in front of the diner, and a chauffeur helped a rich-looking lady out of the rear door. They both came inside.

The lady smiled at Homer and ordered, "Please may I have a dozen donuts and a small coffee to go?"

"I'm sorry, Ma'am, but we sold out of donuts earlier. I'm making more now. It'll be a while." Then the lady, whom Homer thought was a little over-friendly, offered to make the batter!

Meekly, Homer and the chauffeur just stood by and handed things to the lady while she mixed up a huge amount of batter. Worried, Homer said quietly, "This is about *TEN* times as much as Uncle Ulysses makes." But when a few dozen donuts had rolled down a little chute, the lady put on her jewelry and coat. Taking the coffee and donuts, she and her chauffeur drove away. Homer relaxed as a few more dozen donuts rolled down the chute.

Then he decided, "I guess that's enough donuts for the movie crowd." And he pushed the stop button. Nothing happened. The machine continued making more and more donuts.

Homer panicked. Nervously he phoned his uncle and stacked donuts at the same time. Pretty soon the movie crowd gathered outside the window. While they watched, they began guessing how many thousand donuts there were. "Looks like you'll hafta hire a truck ta haul 'em away!" someone hollered.

Just then the lady, the chauffeur and Uncle Ulysses came pushing through the crowd into the diner. “I’ve misplaced my diamond bracelet!” she gasped. “I know I put it here on the counter.”

Well, people started searching all around and under the donuts, but it was nowhere to be found. “I’ll give a \$300.00 reward for that bracelet,” the lady declared. She wrung her hands. Uncle Ulysses groaned. Homer sat down to think.

“Say! I bet the bracelet is cooked inside one of these donuts! And I’ve got a plan!” said Homer.

The donuts began to sell—dozens of them. And when all but the last few had been sold, a girl shouted, “I gawt it!” Sure enough, there was the bracelet inside her donut. Then she went home with three hundred dollars. The moviegoers went home full of donuts. The lady and her chauffeur drove off with the diamond bracelet. And Homer breathed a sigh of relief.

It was a long time before Homer ate another donut.

Fresh Donuts
2 for 5¢
While They Last
\$300.00 prize
for finding a
bracelet inside a donut.
P.S. You can’t keep
the bracelet.

Odysseus and the Cyclops
Adapted from *The Odyssey*, by Homer

Returning home from the Trojan War, the Greek hero Odysseus and his men directed their vessel to the island of the three Cyclopes. These were terrible giants who had one eye in the middle of their foreheads. They raised tremendous sheep which they devoured whole. Now Odysseus and his crew took shelter in the cave of the Cyclops named Polyphemus. When this monster came back later that evening, he shouldered a rock across the mouth of the cave. The men were completely trapped.

Odysseus plotted their escape while the malevolent Cyclops slept. Then when morning arrived, the leviathan departed to pasture his sheep. In haste Odysseus and his crew hewed an olive tree, which they sharpened and hid. Polyphemus inquired of Odysseus his name on that second night. "I am No One," responded Odysseus. "Have some wine!" The drink caused the monster to fall into a heavy sleep. Easily clambering onto his chest, with all their might the men thrust the stake into the giant's eye. In pain he screamed.

"Are you under attack?" asked his brothers.

And Polyphemus cried out, "No One has hurt me!"

On the third day the blind Cyclops let his huge sheep out of the cave, one at a time. As they rambled by, Polyphemus stroked their fleece. He was attempting to prevent the men from escaping, but he was outsmarted. From his ship Odysseus bellowed, "We have gotten out of your cave by strapping ourselves beneath the animals' bellies, Polyphemus! I am not No One! I am Odysseus! Remember it well!"

The Gift of the Magi
Adapted from O. Henry

Della stood by the window. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only \$1.87 with which to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result. Jim's salary, twenty dollars a week, doesn't go far. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him. Something fine and rare and sterling—something just a little bit near to being worthy of the honor of being owned by Mr. James Dillingham Young.

Suddenly she whirled from the window and stood before the looking glass. Her eyes were shining brilliantly. Rapidly she pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length. Now there were two possessions of the James Dillingham Youngs in which they both took a mighty pride. One was Jim's gold watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's. The other was Della's hair. Had the Queen of Sheba lived in the flat across the airshaft, Della would have let her hair hang out the window some day just to depreciate Her Majesty's jewels and gifts. Had King Solomon been the janitor, with all his treasures piled up in the basement, Jim would have pulled out his watch every time he passed, just to see him pluck at his beard from envy.

So now Della's beautiful hair fell about her, rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters. It reached below her knee and made itself almost a garment for her. And then she did it up again nervously and quickly. Once she faltered for a minute and stood still while a tear or two splashed on the worn red carpet. With a whirl of skirts and with the brilliant sparkle still in her eyes, she fluttered out the door and down the stairs to the street. Where she stopped the sign read: "Madame Sofronie. Hair Goods of All Kinds." One flight up Della ran, and collected herself, panting. "Will you buy my hair?" asked Della. Down rippled the brown cascade.

"Twenty dollars," said Madame, lifting up the mass with a practiced hand.

Oh, and the next two hours tripped by on rosy wings. Della was ransacking the stores for Jim's present. She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. It was a platinum fob chain, simple and chaste in design, properly proclaiming its value by substance alone and not by meretricious ornamentation—as all good things should do. It was even worthy of The Watch. As soon as she saw it she knew that it must be Jim's. Twenty-one dollars they took from her for it, and she hurried home with the eighty-seven cents. With that chain on his watch Jim might be properly anxious about the time in any company. Grand as the watch was, he sometimes looked at it on the sly on account of the old leather strap that he used in place of a chain.

When Della reached home her intoxication gave way a little to prudence and reason. She got out her curling irons and lighted the gas and went to work repairing the ravages made by generosity added to love. Within forty minutes her head was covered with tiny, close-lying curls that made her look wonderfully like a truant schoolboy. She looked at her reflection in the mirror

long, carefully, and critically. “If Jim doesn’t kill me,” she said to herself, “he’ll say I look like a Coney Island chorus girl. But what could I do—oh! what could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents?”

Jim was never late. At 7 o’clock Della doubled the fob chain in her hand and sat on the corner of the table near the door that he always entered. Then she heard his step on the stairway and she turned white for just a moment. She had a habit of saying a little silent prayer about the simplest everyday things, and now she whispered, “Please God, make him think I am still pretty.” The door opened and Jim stepped in and closed it. He stopped, as immovable as a setter at the scent of quail. His eyes were fixed upon Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not read. It was not anger, nor surprise, nor disapproval, nor horror, nor any of the sentiments she had prepared for. He simply stared at her fixedly with that peculiar expression on his face. Della wriggled off the table and went for him.

“Jim, darling,” she cried, “don’t look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold because I couldn’t have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It’ll grow out again. My hair grows awfully fast. Say ‘Merry Christmas!’ Jim, and let’s be happy. You don’t know what a beautiful, nice gift I’ve got for you.”

“You’ve cut off your hair?” asked Jim laboriously, as if he had not arrived at that patent fact yet, even after the hardest mental labor. Jim enfolded his Della. For ten seconds let us regard with discreet scrutiny some inconsequential object in the other direction. Eight dollars a week or a million a year—what is the difference? A mathematician or a wit would give you the wrong answer. The magi brought valuable gifts, but that was not among them. This dark assertion will be illuminated later on.

Jim drew a package from his overcoat pocket and threw it upon the table. “Don’t make any mistake, Dell,” he said. “I don’t think there’s anything in the way of a haircut or a shave or a shampoo that could make me like my girl any less. But if you’ll unwrap that package you may see why you had me going a while at first.”

White fingers and nimble tore at the string and paper. And then an ecstatic scream of joy; and then, alas! a quick feminine change to hysterical tears and wails, necessitating the immediate employment of all the comforting powers of the lord of the flat. For there lay The Combs—the set of combs, side and back, that Della had worshipped long in a Broadway window, pure tortoise shell, with jeweled rims—just the shade to wear in the beautiful vanished hair. They were expensive combs, she knew, and her heart had simply yearned over them without the least hope of possession. And now they were hers, but the tresses that should have adorned the coveted ornaments were gone. But she hugged them to her bosom, and then leaped up like a little singed cat. She held his present out to him eagerly upon her open palm. The precious metal seemed to flash with a reflection of her bright and ardent spirit. “Isn’t it a dandy, Jim? Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on it.”

Instead of obeying, Jim tumbled down on the couch and put his hands under the back of his head and smiled. “Dell, let’s put our Christmas presents away and keep ‘em a while. They’re

too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. And now suppose we have supper.”

The magi as you know, were wise men who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents. And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat, who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But in a last word to the wise, let it be said that of all who give gifts these two were the wisest. O, of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. They are the magi.

The Nightingale

Adapted from Hans Christian Andersen (1835)

In China, as you know, the Emperor is a Chinese and the population all around him are Chinese, too. It is many decades since the story I am going to tell you happened, but that is all the more reason for telling it, lest it be forgotten. The Emperor's palace was the most exquisite thing in the world. It was constructed entirely of finest porcelain, which was very costly. The most extravagant flowers were to be seen in the Emperor's garden, and it was so voluminous that even the gardener himself did not know where it ended.

If one went on walking, one came to extraordinary woods with lofty trees and deep lakes. And among these trees lived a nightingale, which sang so deliciously that even the poor fisherman, who had plenty of other things to do, lay still to listen to it when he was out at night drawing in his nets. Fascinated travelers came to seek out the Emperor from every country. They admired everything very much. When they got home they described it all, and nobody forgot the nightingale—it was always put above everything else.

“What is this?” said the Emperor. “Is there such a bird in my own garden and I have never heard of it? I wish it to appear here this evening to perform for me.”

Among the court there was much questioning about this, until at last they found a poor scullery maid in the kitchen who said, “Oh heavens! I know it very well.” Then half the court went into the garden with her. As the great throng passed, the frogs began to croak.

“How beautiful!” said the Chinese chaplain.

“No, those are the frogs, but we shall soon hear it now,” said the little kitchen maid. Then the nightingale began to warble. “Listen! There it sits,” she whispered. And she pointed to a plain little gray bird among the branches. “Little nightingale, our Gracious Emperor wishes you to sing to him.”

“I sing best among the trees,” said the nightingale, but it went with them willingly and serenaded at length. Tears came into the Emperor's eyes. Its notes melted all hearts. Yes, indeed the nightingale created a sensation. It was to remain at court now and dwell in its own cage.

One day a large parcel was delivered to the Emperor. It was an artificial nightingale studded all over with fabulous diamonds, rubies and sapphires. When it was wound up, it could sing one of the songs the real one sang, and it rhythmically wagged its tail. “Now, they must sing together,” proclaimed the music master. But they did not get on very well, for the real nightingale sang in its own way, and the fake one could only sing waltzes. Actually, the artificial nightingale was much prettier to look at, thought the courtiers, because it glittered like bracelets. It sang the same tune three and thirty times over and yet it was not tired. Meanwhile the real nightingale had flown out of the open window, back to its own green woods.

“What an ungrateful bird,” sniffed the court. It was henceforth banished from the kingdom.

The artificial bird now received the number one place beside the Emperor’s bed. But one year later when the bird was singing its best, something gave way. “Whirr!” went the wheels inside it, and the music stopped.

This was a great blow! The court decided to let the artificial bird sing only once a year. Five years passed, and then a great grief came upon the nation. Their Emperor was ill and could not live, it was remarked. “Music, music!” shrieked the Emperor. “Little golden bird, sing, I tell you!” But the bird stood silent.

Death fixed its empty eyes upon the Emperor, when suddenly, close to the window there was a burst of lovely song. It was the living nightingale. It had heard of the Emperor’s need and had come to offer comfort and hope to him. As it sang, the blood coursed with fresh vigor in the Emperor’s veins. Even Death himself listened and entreated, “Go on, little nightingale, go on.” The lovely songs brought to Death a longing for his own garden, and like a cold gray mist he passed out of the window.

“Thanks, thanks!” said the Emperor. “Heavenly bird I banished you, and yet you have charmed Death away from my heart. How can I ever repay you?”

“You have rewarded me,” said the nightingale. “I brought tears to your eyes the very first time I ever sang to you, and I shall never forget it. Those are the precious jewels which gladden the heart of a singer.”

“You must evermore stay with me,” said the Emperor. “You shall sing only when you like, and I will shatter the artificial bird into a thousand pieces.”

“Don’t do that,” responded the nightingale. “It did all the good it could. I cannot build my nest in this palace, but let me approach whenever I like. I will sing to you about the good and evil, about the poor fisherman as well as your court. But you must promise me one thing. Let it be revealed to no one that you have a little bird who tells you everything. It will be better so.”

Then he flew away. The attendants came in to inquire after their dying Emperor—and there he stood, bidding them, “Good morning!”

The Fox and the Grapes

by Aesop

A ravenous fox came into a vineyard one autumn. The vines were full of appetizing, succulent grapes that made his mouth water. Unfortunately, the vines were on a lofty trellis above the fox's head. The fox could not reach them no matter how nimbly he leapt or sprang. He conceded defeat at last. In his disappointment the fox murmured, "Let someone else have these grapes. They're probably sour anyway."

Moral: Those who pass judgment on what they cannot have make poor critics.

Perseus and Medusa

In ancient times Medusa was one of three gruesome sisters called the Gorgons. They had snakes for hair, tusks like boars, sharp claws and wings of gold. Anyone who looked directly at a Gorgon turned to stone.

The exceptional, young Greek hero Perseus was on a quest to slay Medusa. Fortunately, he had the powerful assistance of the gods on Mount Olympus. They gave him a mighty sword to cut off Medusa's head and a unique pouch to carry it in. Hermes, messenger of the gods, contributed winged sandals so that Perseus could fly. Vulcan, the blacksmith god, made a magical helmet; Perseus could become invisible when he donned it. From the goddess of wisdom, Athena, he received one final bestowal. It was a magnificent shield. Burnished so that Perseus could see his face in it, this shield was vital to his endeavor.

"Use it as a mirror," Athena instructed him. Perseus understood.

Entering Medusa's lair, Perseus squeezed through the crowd of stone victims. If he chanced to gaze at her face, he too would become a statue. Perseus flew backward and held his shield in front of his face. He could see the monster's face clearly, reflected in the shiny metal. Medusa herself was asleep, but the snakes on her head were never dormant. They smelled someone nearby. They jabbed at the air with their poisonous, forked tongues, but Perseus was invisible to them. Then the hero wielded his sword, and the Gorgon's head fell—clunk—to the ground. Carefully he placed it in the pouch, for Medusa's ghastly ability to turn men into stone would last for all time.

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Kangaroo Rats

Kangaroo rats are cute, furry rodents that live in the desert. They have long hind legs and short forelegs. They hop instead of running. Their long tufted tails help them keep their balance as they hop along. They are mostly white on the belly with brown or tan fur on their backs. They do not have any fur on their tiny rounded ears. Their shiny black eyes help them see in the dark. Kangaroo rats are adorable animals.

The desert is the kangaroo rats' habitat. They live in the dry regions of the Southwestern deserts in the United States. Sandy or rocky soil is perfect for digging underground homes. There is not much vegetation in this climate. Kangaroo rats survive on seeds, grasses, and small insects. They are so small that they do not require much food. This unfriendly habitat is perfect for them.

Kangaroo rats can live without drinking water. They are able to get water out of the seeds that they eat. They do not drink or store water at all. They do not sweat except on the bottom of their feet. They live in burrows underground where it is damp and cool to avoid the desert heat. They do not come out until late at night when the temperature is cool. Kangaroo rats do not need to drink water.

Two to three litters are born to each kangaroo rat female every year. Each litter can have up to seven pups. Normally a litter includes only two pups. It only takes thirty days for the pups to develop inside their mother before they are ready to be born. When they are born, they are hairless and toothless. Their eyes and ears are closed for a few weeks after birth. The future fur color patterns can be seen on the tender pink skin. Hundreds of baby kangaroo rats are born in the desert every year.

Kangaroo rats are not social at all. They keep to themselves and protect their burrows from others. They block the entrances to their homes with dirt during the day to keep the hot air and other animals out. There is so little food in the desert that they hide the seeds in their dens. Sometimes they growl and thump their hind feet to chase others away from their space. Kangaroo rats are not friendly.



Pint-Sized Hoarders

A kangaroo rat is a funny little animal. It hops around on its long hind legs like a tiny kangaroo. It uses its short front legs for digging and gathering seeds. It never runs about on all four legs like other rats. Nighttime is its busy time for finding food. The kangaroo rat stuffs the seeds it finds in its fur-lined cheek pouches until they are full. Then, it puts the seeds in its burrow to eat later. The kangaroo rat is fun to watch.

The kangaroo rat is small and cute! It is only twelve inches long including its tail. Its tail has a puff of fur on the end. It is longer than the animal's body and head. It has large brown eyes. Its ears are furless and rounded. The plump body of the kangaroo rat is covered in a mixture of tan, cream, and white fur. The kangaroo rat is an adorable rodent.

There are twenty-two species of kangaroo rat. All of them live in North America. Some of these desert mammals live only in California. Their habitat is in arid deserts where the soil is sandy or rocky. The giant kangaroo rat is the largest of the species. It weighs about five ounces. Ord's kangaroo rat is one of the smallest, most common species.

Kangaroo rats live in colonies, but they do not work together. They do not even pay attention to each other. They only migrate when the food supply is gone. Sometimes they move as far as a mile away to set up their new homes. Up to twelve kangaroo rats may live on one acre of land. The colony spaces the burrows far enough apart that each has enough room to graze.

For years kangaroo rats were no problem to man. Recently more people have moved into their habitat. The kangaroo rat has become a pest. Ranchers have sown grass seed for their animals to graze upon. Farmers have begun to irrigate their crops. This is a gold mine for the kangaroo rat. They steal the seeds that ranchers and farmers have planted. People now see the pint-sized hoarders as pests.



Petite Hoppers

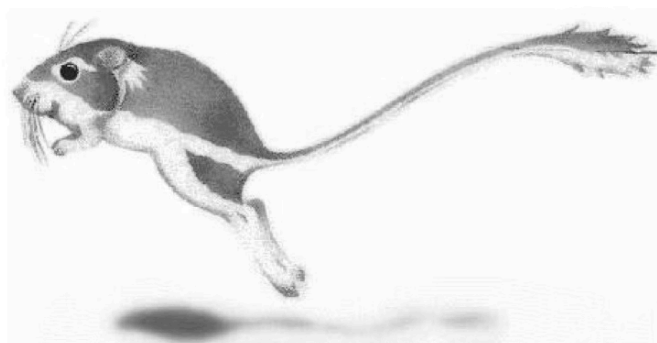
Kangaroo rats are neither kangaroos nor rats. They resemble mice, but they are not. They are in a family that includes only kangaroo rats and pocket mice. There are twenty-two species within the family. The banner tailg kangaroo rat, which is one of the largest, has a black tail with a bushy white tip. The desert kangaroo rat has a white tip on its tail, too, but its body is yellow instead of brown. There is much variety in this rodent family.

Baby kangaroo rats are called pups. They are ugly and helpless when they are born. They have no fur or teeth. They cannot see or hear. They wiggle and squirm looking for their mother to feed them. Sometimes there are as many as seven pups in a litter. The pups will be cute in about two months when their fur grows in.

Humans do not often see kangaroo rats. They live in sparsely populated areas and they are active only at night. The daytime is extremely hot in the desert where they live, so they stay inside their burrows. Many larger animals like to eat kangaroo rats. To avoid being eaten, they hop around only at night. Kangaroo rats hide from danger.

These tiny hoppers spend their nighttime hours gathering food and putting it in pouches in their cheeks. The pouches are actually on the outside of their mouth. They are fur lined and dry. They carry their food efficiently while continuing to search for more. After they have stuffed their cheek pockets full, the kangaroo rats deliver the food to hiding places in their dens. They have a handy carrying case for their food.

Kangaroo rats are great jumpers. They have large hind feet and legs that help them jump up to nine feet in one bound. Their feet are hairy on top and on the sole. Balance is not a problem because of their long tails. Because they stand on their hind feet, they are considered bipedal. When they jump, there are two footprints and a tail print in the sand. It is no wonder that these petite hoppers are called kangaroo rats.



Hummingbirds

There are over three hundred species of hummingbirds in the world. Seventeen species live in the United States. Only the Ruby-throated Hummingbird resides in the eastern part of the United States, however. The Bee Hummingbird is the smallest bird in the world. It measures only 2.25 inches long. The Giant Hummingbird, which is the largest of all the hummingbirds, is eight inches long and lives in the Andes Mountains of South America. The many species of hummingbirds are quite varied.

Tiny hummingbirds have a large range. They live in North, Central, and South America. Most species inhabit South America. They do not live in other parts of the world. Each year, some hummingbirds fly from North to South to find food and warm weather. Others stay in the same place all year. The various hummingbirds' ranges are considerable.

Hummingbirds have beautiful, magnificently colored feathers. They shimmer like jewels in the sunshine. They shine so much because of the way they reflect the light. Some are red, green, violet or orange. They look like tiny gems with wings.

Truly, hummingbirds are flying experts. They fly so fast their wings make a humming sound. Their wings flap eighty beats per second. They can fly upside-down or backwards. Like a helicopter, they can hover in one place.

Hummingbirds can fly like acrobats.

A hummingbird's nest is a tiny work of art. The mother bird lines it with spider webs and soft wool from cattail plants. The birds build the nest high up in the tree branches and hide it among the leaves. The eggs in the nest are only the size of raisins. Hummingbirds make wonderful nests.



Tiny Flyers

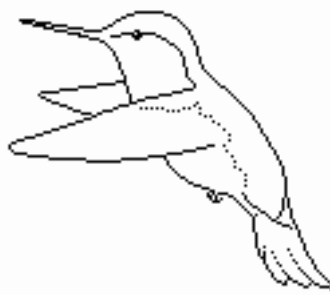
Although they are known for their tiny bodies, hummingbirds can also have long beaks or tails. The Swordbill lives in the Andes Mountains. It has only a three-inch body, but its skinny beak can be up to five inches long. The Streamertail Hummingbird lives in Jamaica. Its tail is two times longer than its body. Some hummingbirds are famous for their long beaks and tails.

Hummingbirds are not afraid of their enemies. They bravely fight any attacker. They know that none of their enemies can catch them. When there are eggs in the nest, the male will zealously guard them from predators. They are courageous birds.

Amazingly, hummingbirds eat fifty to sixty meals a day. Their little bodies need a great deal of energy. They search for nectar, ants, and gnats with their needle-thin beaks. They busily hum from flower to flower and sometimes steal insects from spiders' webs. They need a high-energy diet.

Hummingbirds fly long distances. In the autumn, they eat furiously to prepare for the long journey. When the trip begins, they travel without eating or resting. The Ruby-throated Hummingbird flies nonstop across the entire Gulf of Mexico in only about twenty hours. They are long distance flyers.

Hummingbirds have beautiful feathers that shine in the sun. The most brightly colored feathers are found on the throat and upper chest of the male. The feathers are shiny because they have a fine coating on them that reflects light. We can only see this reflected light when the sunshine hits the feathers at just the right angle. These tiny flyers have gorgeous, glittering feathers.



Beautiful Brave Birds

Hummingbirds have a unique appearance. Extremely bright colors, long tails and thin beaks make them a remarkable sight. Cleverly, they use their beaks as tools to find food. Perhaps their long tails help to give them balance. The dazzling feathers seem to be mostly for show. Hummingbirds are certainly unusual looking birds.

Expertly, they fly like helicopters. They fly straight up and straight down. They can fly sideways and even upside-down. With their strong wings, they can hover near a flower for long periods of time. They dart from flower to flower. Hummingbirds' wings seem invisible because they move at such dizzying speeds. They fly better than helicopters.



Hummingbirds eat things that they can reach with their needle-like beaks. Nectar and honey give them the energy they need. Their stomachs are very small, and they must eat fifty to sixty meals a day. Sometimes they catch an insect hidden in the petals of a flower. Hummingbirds must eat almost continuously to keep up their energy.

Hummingbirds come in all different sizes, from tiny to small. Some grow as large as a sparrow, about eight inches long. Others are as small as bumblebees. It is commonly known that they are the smallest birds in the world. Although they are all small, their sizes differ depending upon their habitat.

Male hummingbirds spend a great deal of their time protecting their nests. They become aggressive when enemies fly nearby. Darting here and there, the father bird scolds. The mother bird builds the nest and lays the eggs. The male keeps them safe and out of danger. Hummingbirds are beautiful, brave birds.

Flamingoes

Flamingoes are tall, beautiful, pink birds. Their pink color comes from the food they eat. Caribbean flamingoes have the brightest color with red bills, legs, and faces. Some of the smaller birds have only a hint of pink in their feathers. All flamingoes, however, have long necks and legs with webbed feet. Twelve to sixteen feathers create a lovely tail. Flamingoes are large, colorful birds.

Flamingoes come in many types: Chilean, Caribbean and African, to name just three. All of them are pink with long legs, necks and bills. The tallest species of flamingoes are fifty-one inches tall and weigh about seven pounds each. The smallest kind of flamingo grows to be around thirty-one inches and only weighs about five pounds. Males in every variety are taller than the females.

Flamingoes are obviously social birds. They live in groups called colonies. They eat together, fly together, and nest together. In rhythm, they gracefully stretch their necks and wave their heads from side to side. They also seem to spread their wings together in a wing salute. The chicks are raised together in a group called a crèche. Flamingoes are never found without their group.

Salty lagoons and lakes are the flamingoes' habitats. They live in tropical and subtropical areas. Muddy, shallow water is what they like best. There is not much vegetation in the water they choose. Fish eat the flamingoes' food, so they are not welcome. These pink birds choose salty places to live because food is easy to find there.

Flamingoes are large birds, but they eat tiny food. Most of them eat algae, crustaceans or insects in the water. Catching their food with their heads upside down, flamingoes suck the muddy water into their bills. Their tongues filter the food out of the water as it is pumped back out of the bill. The shapes of their bills tell what kind of food they eat. Flamingoes with smaller bills eat algae from the muddy water. Their food is very small indeed.

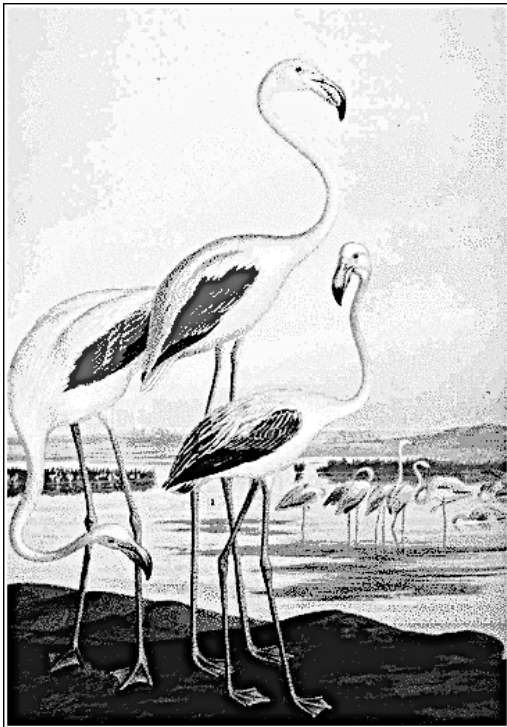


From Fluff to Flight

Flamingos are hard-working parents. They labor for months building a mud nest. The mother and father flamingo make the nest for their egg into the perfect shape. It looks strangely like a volcano when it is finished. Flamingos only have one chick each year. The flamingo parents need a safe place to keep their egg.

Flamingo eggs are quite large. They are oblong like chicken eggs and weigh about four ounces. The mother and father flamingo take turns sitting on the egg. They lift and turn it with their long bills. It takes about thirty days for the single egg to hatch. When the chick begins to hatch, the parents watch and make noises calling their baby to come out. Soon a chick breaks through the hefty egg's shell.

A flamingo chick only stays in the nest for about one week. When it is strong enough to stand and walk, it begins to wander. Then the parents must watch carefully to keep the little one safe. Once they leave the nest, they live together with all the other baby flamingos. It is like a playgroup, which is carefully guarded by the parents. This group is called a creche, which means "crib."



Although pink as adults, these birds begin life as white and gray chicks. They have swollen red legs and a straight red bill. In about a week, the legs and bill turn black. Their beaks do not begin to curve until they are eleven weeks old. They can swim soon after they hatch, but they do not have the ability to fly until they are almost three months old. Some flamingos take up to three years to turn pink, even though they reach full size at a year and a half.

Adult flamingos have lovely, long necks. Their legs are spindly and seem to bend backwards. Their bills are curved and colored black or pink. They have webbed feet that help them swim and stir up food from the bottom of the pond or lake. Black flight feathers can be seen on the flamingos' pink wings when they fly. Even in flight, they are handsome birds.

Serene Pink Birds

What is pink and black and stands on one leg? A flamingo, of course. Most people know what a flamingo looks like. It is an odd-looking bird with spindly legs. The long legs of the flamingo are so thin they look like they might break. When a flamingo wants to swim, it folds those long legs up under its body. Most of the time a flamingo wades in the water, splashing and stirring the mud. When a flamingo sleeps, it's true—it stands on one leg.



Flamingos have funny looking bills that seem too heavy for their heads, and long, skinny necks that twist and turn like pretzels. They can even turn their heads upside down to sift water through their bills. This bird needs a large beak to scoop up great amounts of water. It gets its food from the muddy water by sifting it with its small, spiny tongue. The food is caught on the tongue and then, the bird squirts the extra water out. A flamingo's huge bill has a very specialized purpose.

Most people do not know that flamingos can fly because normally they see them in zoos, where the birds are captive. Flamingos can and do fly, but it takes some effort for them to get up and away. They have to run a few paces into the wind before they can take off. Once they get into the air, however, they can fly up to thirty-five miles per hour. Sometimes they can be heard honking like geese as they fly. When they land, they must run again to put on the brakes.

Like some other water birds such as herons, in flight a flamingo looks like a stick with wings. Its neck sticks out straight in front, and its legs stick out straight behind. Its wingspan is about the same length as its height, fifty-five inches. It is a comical sight. The bird's flight feathers are black and can only be seen when it flies. It has twelve to fifteen tail feathers that help with balance in the air and on the ground. If you ever see a pink stick soaring in the sky, it just might be a flamingo.

The majority of the time flamingos seem happy to stay on the ground. They stay in colonies for protection and because they like to be together. They have strange group behaviors. Sometimes they will "dance," flapping their wings and moving their heads in rhythm to some unheard beat. Together they spread their wings and stretch their necks in a kind of salute to an unknown leader. Even on the ground, these serene pink birds are a joy to behold.

Terns



Terns live all over the world, except in desert habitats. The Arctic tern breeds and nests in Northern Canada. In the autumn it begins a migration across the Atlantic. Following the coasts of Europe and Africa, it flies 18,000 kilometers south to Antarctica. No other bird has such a widespread North-South range. The Arctic tern is a strong flyer and travels almost constantly. It never rests. Rarely has any other bird mastered living conditions world wide, but terns are truly universal.

A rookery is the name given to the breeding place and nesting area of sea birds. For terns the ideal rookery is a low, rocky or sandy island. Having little or no vegetation, a nesting area should be isolated. Since they must be safe, rookeries must be located far away from the habitat of humans. Safety is paramount. Frequently terns and gulls build rookeries on the same small island. Such rookeries become bird cities.

Civil war rages continuously between gulls and terns when they share an island rookery. Usually, the gulls are the aggressors. They are notorious nest robbers. Raiding for eggs and even eating the young, they will rob other gulls, but they especially love the eggs of the tern. Consequently, a female tern may lay an egg every day for two weeks before she keeps one to hatch. Even after the chick is born, it is in danger from the aggressive gulls. The battle rages continuously between gulls and terns in bird city.

There are over fifty varieties in the tern family. They are a subgroup of the great gull family. Normally, terns are slender, long-winged and smaller than most gulls. While the Arctic tern migrates the farthest, the Caspian tern is the largest with a wingspan of 140 centimeters. When resting, taking off or landing, terns always face the wind. In large groups it is noticeable that terns all sit facing the same direction. Despite many varieties, colors and sizes, terns are very similar.

Men remain the terns' frightful enemies. Occasionally, men who carry buckets of water collect tern eggs on the island of Raja off Mexico. If an egg floats, it is placed back in the nest. If it sinks, it is packed in crates for sale. This is called candling. In the olden days an egg was held up to a candle in a dark room. This was how the word "candling" was invented. If there was a shadow, it meant the chick had begun to form and the egg was therefore no good to eat. Such an egg would also float in water. One Mexican claimed that in one year he collected 27,000 tern eggs on Isla Raza for sale in mainland markets. For a tern one man makes a worse enemy than a thousand gulls. Sadly, some people are never satisfied.

The Battle of Isla Raza

Commonly along the Pacific coast, live two types of terns, royals and elegants. Smaller than the royals, the elegants are more numerous. In color they range from completely white to entirely brown. Sticking up in the air like a punk rock hair style, the black head feathers of both types of terns are amusing. While the royals may be recognized by the white flecks in the black feathers of the face, they mingle easily with their cousins, the elegants. Royals and elegants are friendly.



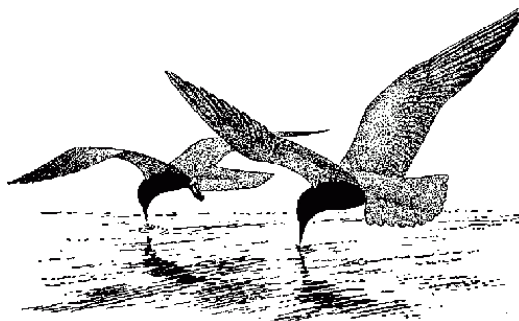
Terns live beside the ocean. Since their favorite food is fish, the ocean provides them in quantity. The royal and elegant terns nest on the Pacific coast of Mexico. While the Pacific varieties fly 3,000 kilometers north as far as Vancouver Island, the Arctic tern migrates south. They seek long days. Breeding in perpetual daylight in the Arctic, they migrate to the continuous light in Antarctica during the Canadian winter. Generally, terns stay close to oceans and large lakes.

Millions of gulls first—then terns later—established rookeries on Isla Raza, an island on the Pacific coast of Mexico. The spot is ideal. The island, which is rocky and sandy with rich fishing grounds nearby, experiences such violent storms that boats have difficulty landing. The nearest human lives fifty miles away. When coming in, the terns must land on each other's backs because they are so tightly packed on the ground. Terns recognize their nests but not their eggs. Switching eggs does not bother them. If the eggs are removed, they merely lay more. Possibly, Isla Raza is one of the largest bird cities in the world.

Two natural foes trouble the terns, one of which is the sun. In addition, the gulls have declared a never-ending war against the terns. As the first citizens, the gulls terrorize the terns in their rookery at the north end of Isla Raza. When the terns fly off the nests to fish for breakfast, the gulls sweep in and seize their eggs. Uniting against the terns, the gulls on Isla Raza do not raid their own nests as they do elsewhere. Normally, the terns must not leave their nests too long because of the killing power of the noonday sun. Both eggs and chicks must be protected from the terrible heat. Since they are vigilant, the terns are increasing. Clearly, terns are winning the rookery battle against both sun and seagull.

The terns enlarged their rookery. A hundred terns chose a new area. When they flew off the first morning, there was a scattering of eggs on the ground. The gulls swept in. The eggs disappeared. They vanished. Next morning twice as many eggs dotted the ground. By nightfall a few remained. Every twenty-four hours there was expansion during the night, contractions in the day. Each day more eggs remained. Gulls gave up. Terns were winning. Gulls were tiring. Like children who eat too much ice cream, the gulls became sick of eggs. Flying out to sea to dive for fish, the gulls ignored the eggs. Successfully, the terns had enlarged their rookery and won the battle of Isla Raza.

Wars on Sable Island



From the cold of the far North to the prickly heat of the tropics, terns have adapted to all kinds of weather. Regularly, the common terns of Sable Island near the coast of Nova Scotia fly south to the West Indies and South America. On the numerous atolls of the Pacific, live the pure white fairy terns. While royal and elegant terns migrate from Mexico to Canada, the Arctic tern flies from one pole to the other. Terns adapt to very hot and very cold climates.

Terns range in color from gleaming white to jet black. They are web footed, swim well and dive expertly to catch fish. Frequently terns are called sea swallows because of the manner in which they dart through the air. The elegant terns of the Pacific, which are brown and white, lay eggs decorated in different lively colors and patterns. The common tern of the Atlantic is white with a black cap. Sporting a red beak and forked tail, the common tern has a pale grey mantle, which covers the back and wings. Terns vary widely in color.

On Sable Island near Nova Scotia, there are two rookeries. The smaller and older one belongs to the common tern. Arriving later, sea gulls established another rookery. It is now the largest. So narrow that the Atlantic sprays right over it, the Sable Island is long and thin. Surrounding waters team with fish, which is the main source of food for the seabirds and their hungry offspring. The island should be called sunny Sable City of the seabirds.

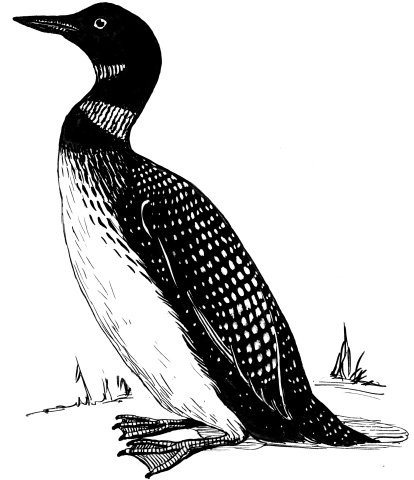
On Sable Island war rages, however. As newcomers to the island, the sea gulls act as kings and seize the terns' eggs. The terns might look for a new location, but there are few islands which man has not colonized. Presumably, the terns believe that war with the gulls was more evenly matched than battling against humans. Eating so many tern eggs, gulls are exterminating the native population. Terns become fewer and fewer. Their rookery gets smaller. They are declining. Undoubtedly, gulls are winning the battle of Sable City.

"Save the terns!" some people cried. As a result the Canadian government outlined a policy to save the terns. Accordingly, officials proposed to kill thousands of gulls by poisoning. "Very inhuman," cried others. "Consider the poor gulls." "Shame on you!" Soon the Nova Scotians declared a talking war. Fiercely, tern supporters battled the gull supporters on radio talk shows. Conservationists battled conservationists. Suddenly, gulls and terns became television stars. Backing down quickly, the government packed away the poison. The terns will not be saved, however, because they are losing the battle on television, as well as the war on Sable Island.

Loons

In the water the loon is noted for its speed. It can swim and dive faster than most fish. When hunting, the loon's head is slightly submerged. This position is called peering. Peering into the water, the head twists and turns, watching, looking and searching for fish. Once prey has been spotted, the loon dives swiftly to make the catch. Rarely does the prey escape because of the loon's swift and superior speed.

Many dangers exist for loons. In addition to man, adult loons are prey to eagles and coyotes. Younger loons, the chicks, are chased and preyed upon by gulls, larger fish, and the adults' enemies. While still eggs, the list of hunters which prey upon them includes ravens and crows, raccoons, and skunks. Man has most endangered loons, however. Building on their nesting grounds, he has changed their water sites and polluted their environment. If the loons survive these many hazards, they may live for twenty to thirty years. Loons live dangerously.

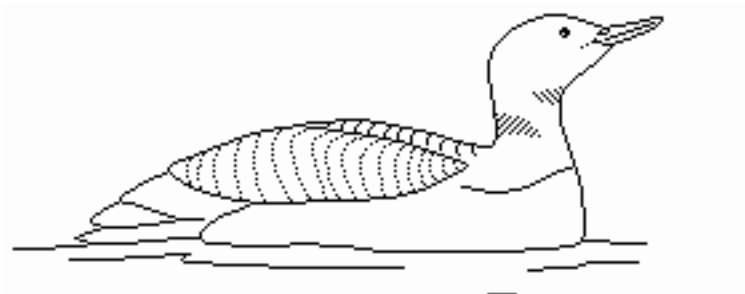


Demonstrating a variety of vocal calls, it has been said that the loon is a master singer among birds. Short hoots are used to track other loons. To attract or call a mate, the loon uses a crying wail. As it echoes over the lake, the loon sounds lonely. Possibly it is. Trembling high-pitched sounds signal danger. Surprisingly, each loon yodels a unique tune to warn others who cross into his territory. A loon is a bird with many voices, numerous cries, and countless wails. Loons are wonderful songsters.

Young loons are made to swim soon after hatching. After twenty-eight days of incubation, the first and second hatchlings appear. Eagerly they break through their shells. As soon as their sticky black down becomes fluffy and dry, they are taken on a trial swim. During this swim, a search is made for a soft, suitable and secure nursery. After testing their ability to swim, the young may be seen happily riding on a parent's back for safety and warmth. The chicks look darling. They feel secure. They nestle. However, most often they are encouraged to swim from the earliest possible moment.

Though loons have been called feathered seals when they dive and swim submerged, they look much more elegant than seals. The back and wing feathers are spread with sparkling white spots on black. Lengthy, slender necks are wrapped by a white band like a necklace. Though very small, their red eyes are very powerful. Not only can loons dive and swim while submerged as well as seals, but they appear much more elegant! Clearly, loons are handsome divers.

Song and Flight Birds



A loon is a marvel in water! Hunting for prey, loons outclass most fish in swimming and twisting, turning, pivoting, and diving. Silently they swim swiftly submerged. Since their legs are very far back on their bodies, they dive with little resistance. Though not classed as waterfowl, loons perform marvelously in water.

Some loons mate for life. After courting, mating and locating a suitable nesting site, the female loon lays two olive brown eggs which are protected carefully. The parents share incubation duties. Obviously, they believe in cooperative parenting because they share equally. Not only do loons come together to breed, often their partnerships last for a lifetime. They are faithful mates.

The loon looks as if it has dressed for a gala evening. Clearly they are ready to party. Like sequins, small white spots cover the glittering black feathers of wings and back. Their appearance is completed by a white band—a necklace—around their elegant necks. Loons are not multicolored. Loons are not flashy. Loons are elegant. If you should spot a smartly-dressed, long-necked, white-on-black water bird, most likely you have seen the well-dressed loon.

Once airborne, loons are fine, fast fliers. They break the speed limit because during migration they have been timed at two kilometers per minute. Unfortunately, loons have trouble with take off and landing. Only from water can they ascend into the air, and they need a long runway. While half flying and half beating their feet on the top of the water, loons strain to ascend into the air. Another problem is descending. Landing heavily, they splash like a rock. Despite these difficulties, loons are swift, powerful fliers often identified by their voices. They can be identified by their songs which are unusual and unique and by their peculiar and awkward flight.

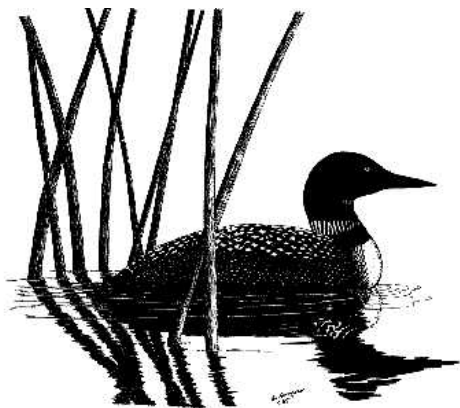
The Loony Submarine

In danger on land because they move so clumsily, loons must leave the water to mate. Mating begins with nodding to signal agreement. Obviously, there is no elaborate courting ceremony. After this choosing, the pair swim about together in search of a nesting place. When a suitable spot is found, the eggs are laid. Incubating the eggs is shared by the parents. Loons are sensible. Parenting means partnership. They share responsibilities. Like true mates, loons share the duties and dangers of nesting on land.

Loons can fly at speeds of 120 kilometers per hour! As remarkable as their speed is, take off is a difficulty for them, however. Their runway must be water. Lifting its eight to fourteen pounds into the air is extremely difficult without a lengthy run at it. Once in the air, though, loons fly at great speeds. Evidently, landing is difficult because they almost crash into the water. As Mrs. Loon gazed skyward, she chuckled to herself, “My loony mate is about to enjoy a crash landing.” He did. She smiled. She sobered. Descending with greater speed, he had slammed into the water with a mighty splash.

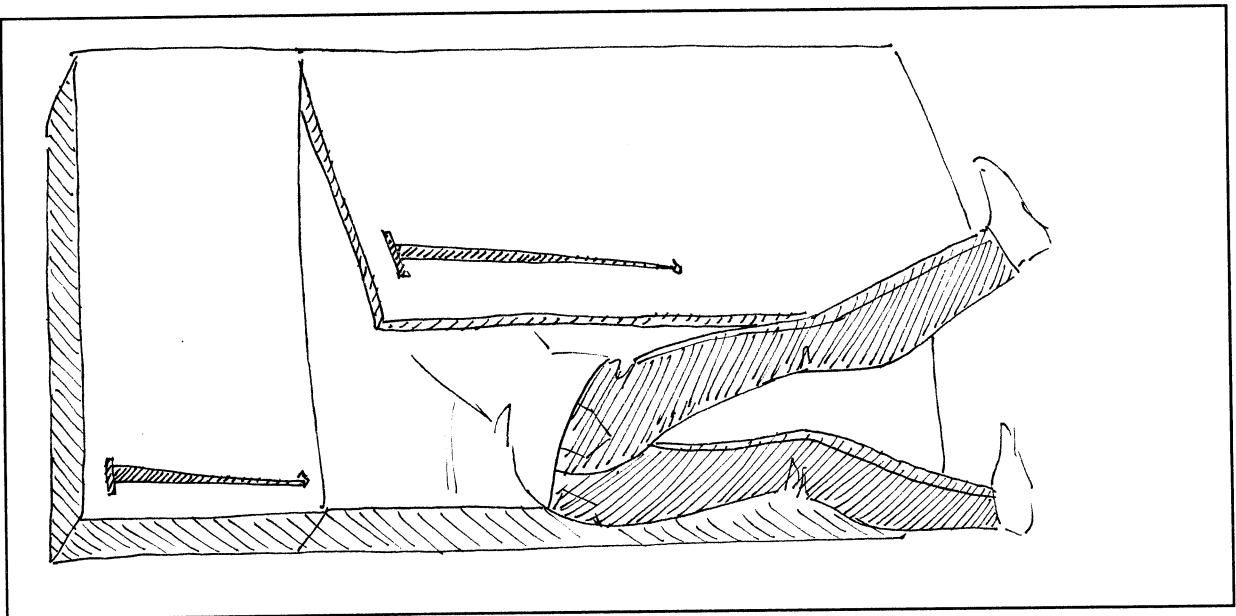
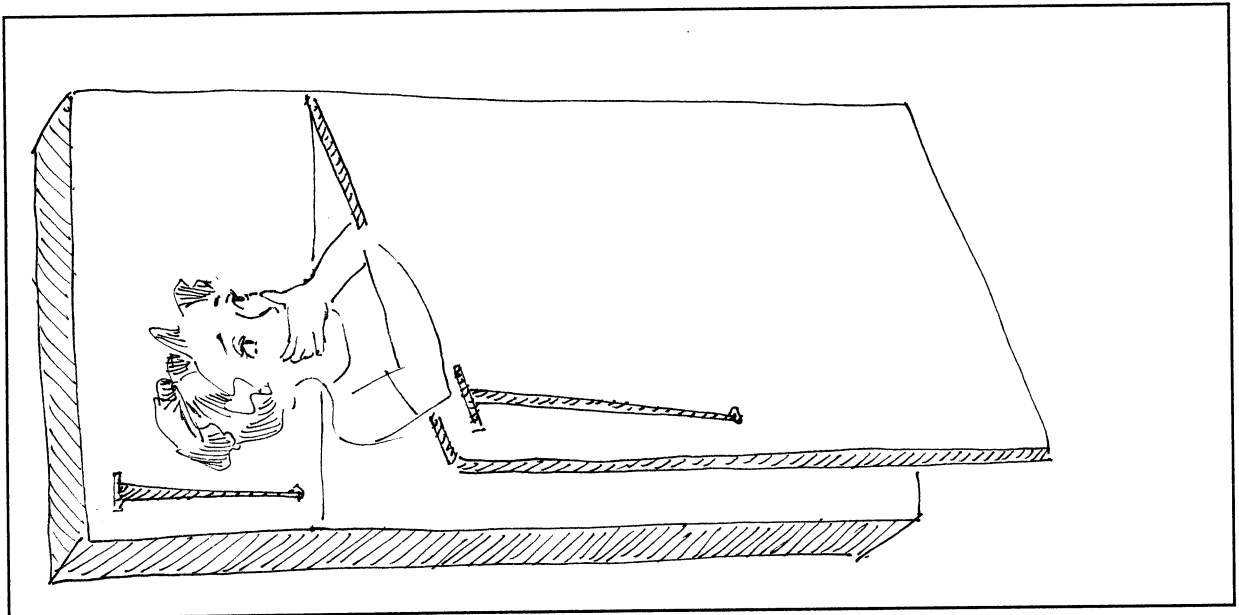
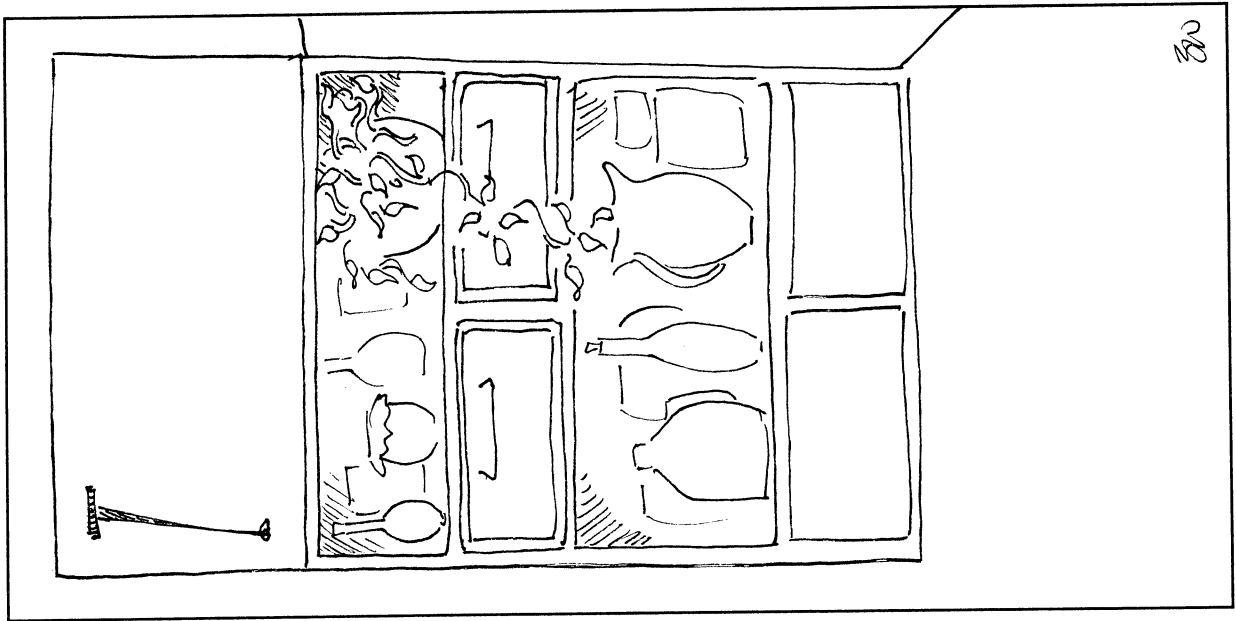
In spite of their weight, loons move with enviable speed and power in water and in air. Heavy bones account for an adult weight of up to fourteen pounds. These heavy bones which have been designed for submerged swimming along with a body shape which is long and sleek, combine to give the loon power. Because of solid weight and a streamlined body, the loons move speedily and powerfully.

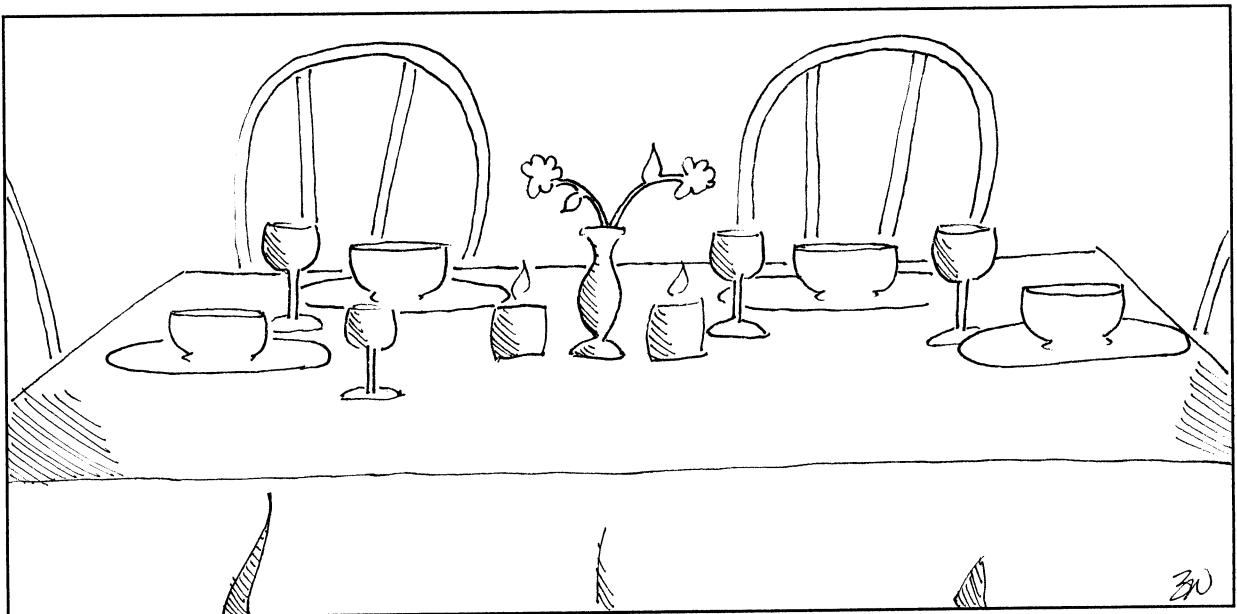
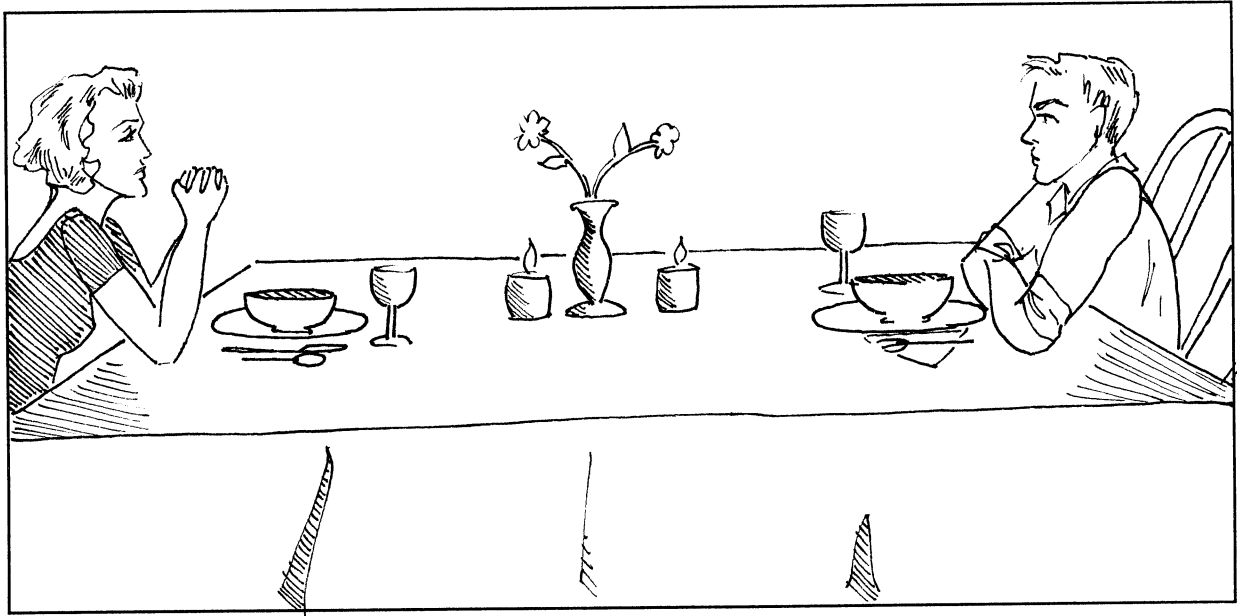
A loon’s cry may be frightening. Though loons have several calls, the most notable one sounds like the laugh of a lunatic. The word “lunatic” means crazy. “Loon” is a short form of this word. When people do odd things, we say they are “crazy as a loon.” In Canada, the dollar coin carries an engraving of a loon. Canadians call them “loonies” partly to make fun of the loon, but also because they thought the government was crazy to issue the coins. On the other hand the cry of the loon has inspired poets and writers. Far from crazy, these wonders in water can make you shiver at their cry, feel lonely at their wail and smile at their laugh.

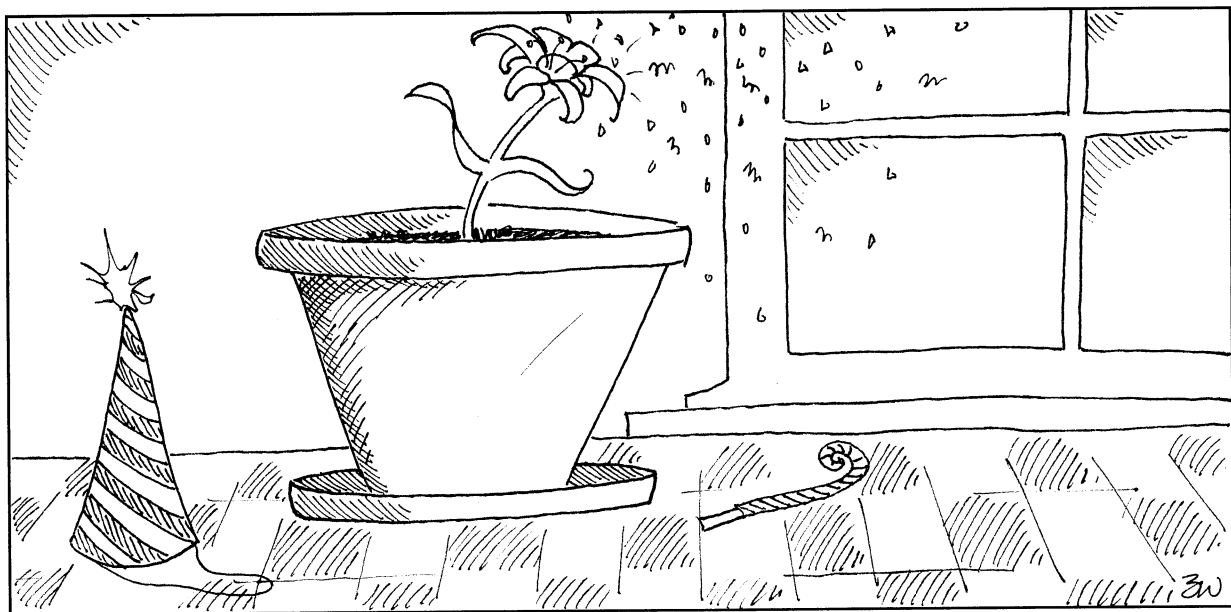
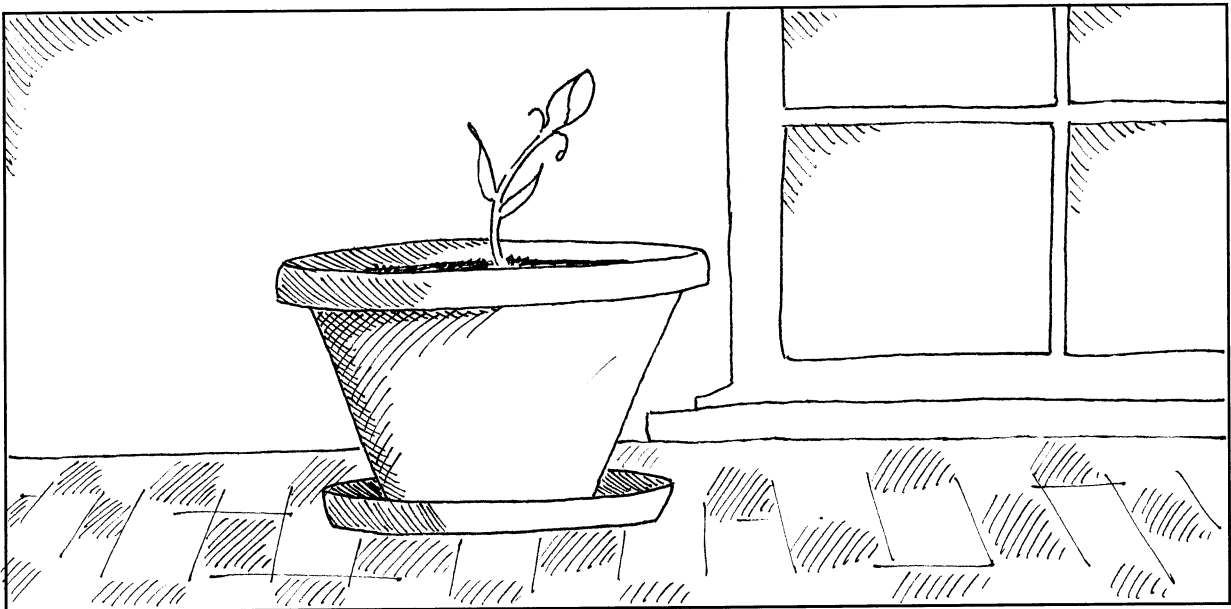
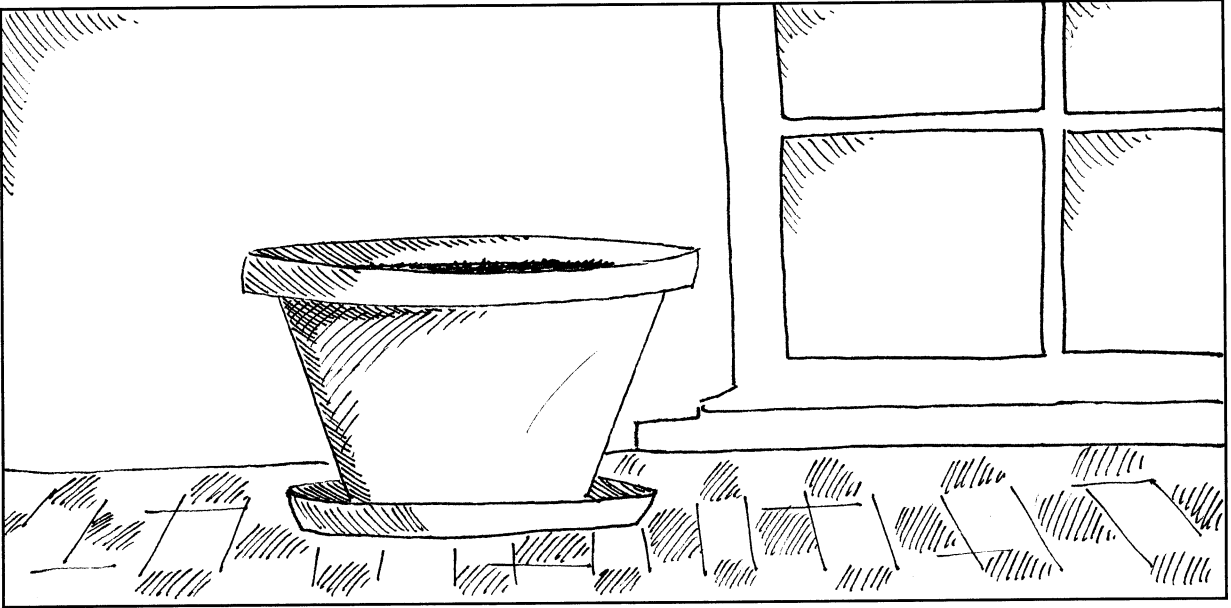


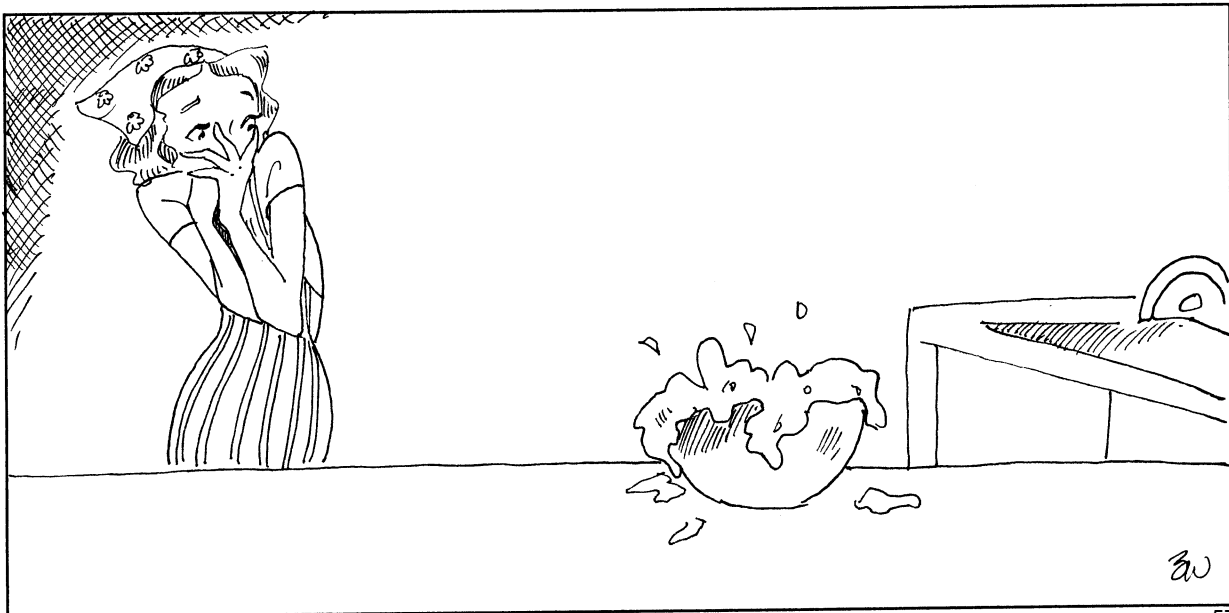
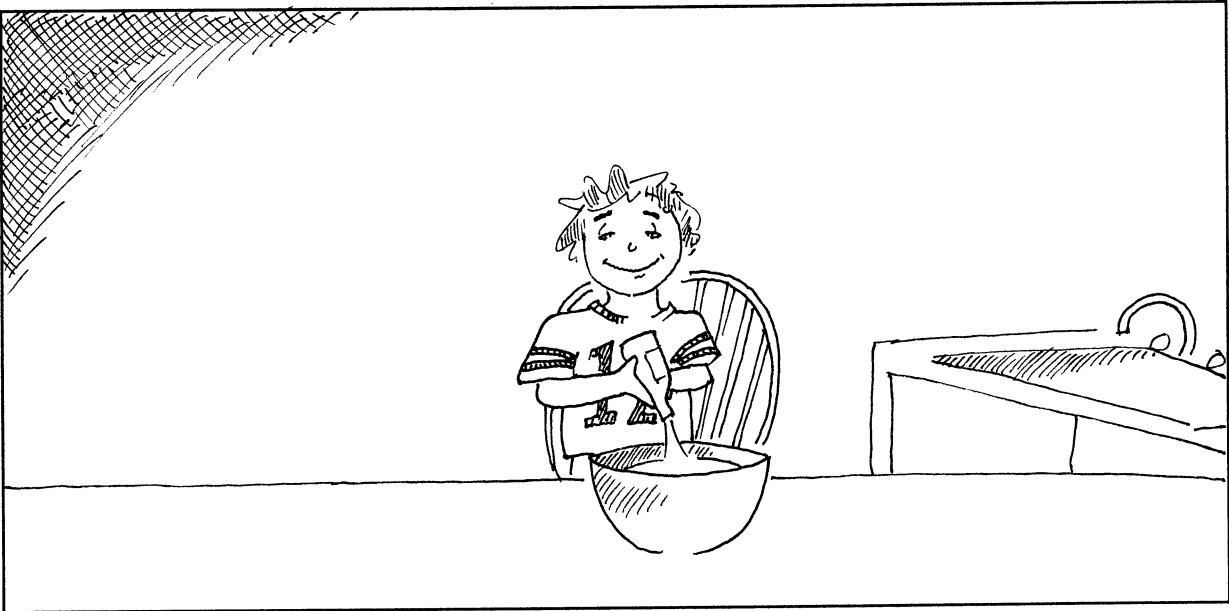
Loons have been likened to submarines. Remarkably, their dives are the deepest, fastest, and longest of any other birds’. They submerge rapidly. While submerged, they are able to twist, turn and pivot with great speed. Avoiding them is difficult. Along with this mobility, loons are known to stay underwater for as long as forty seconds. Fish seldom escape these feathered, loony submarines.

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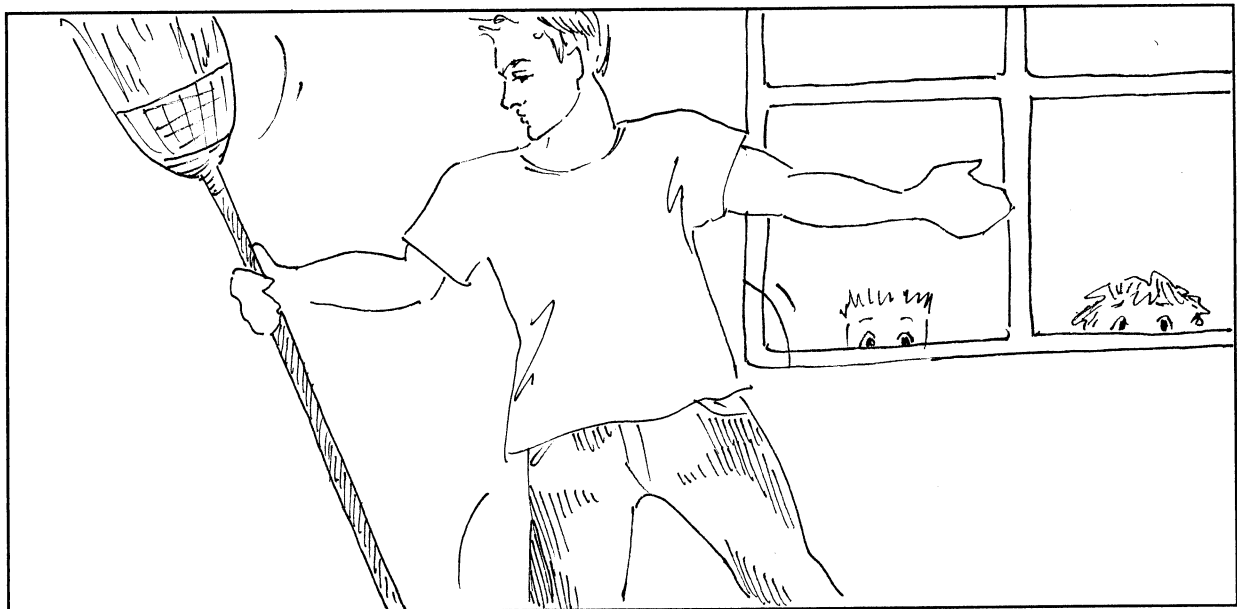
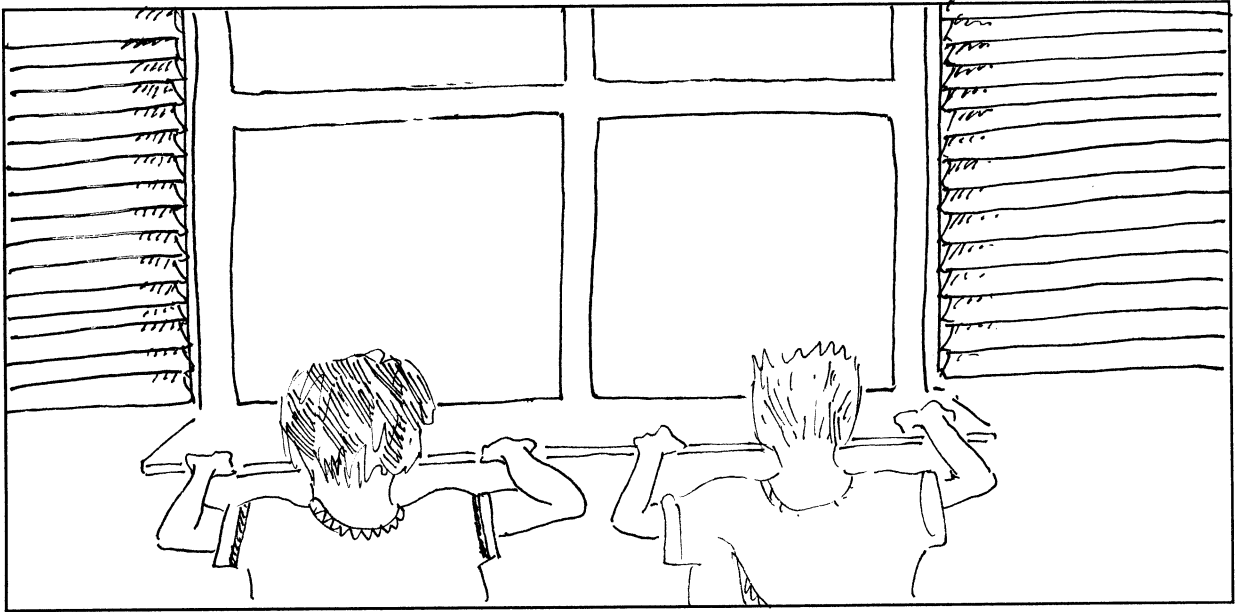


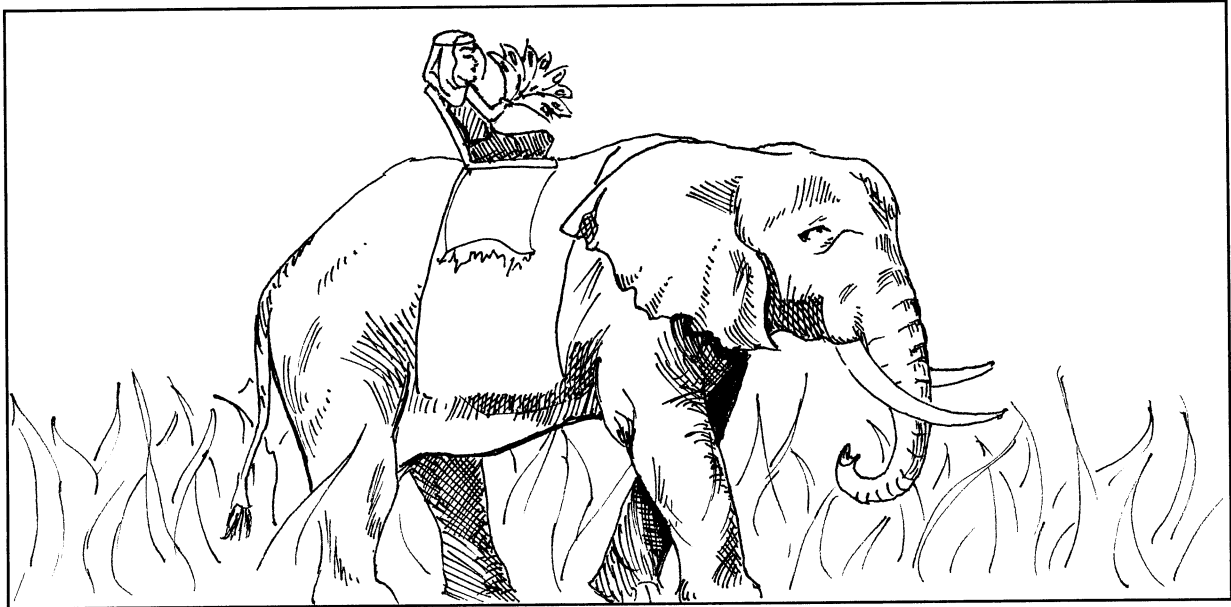


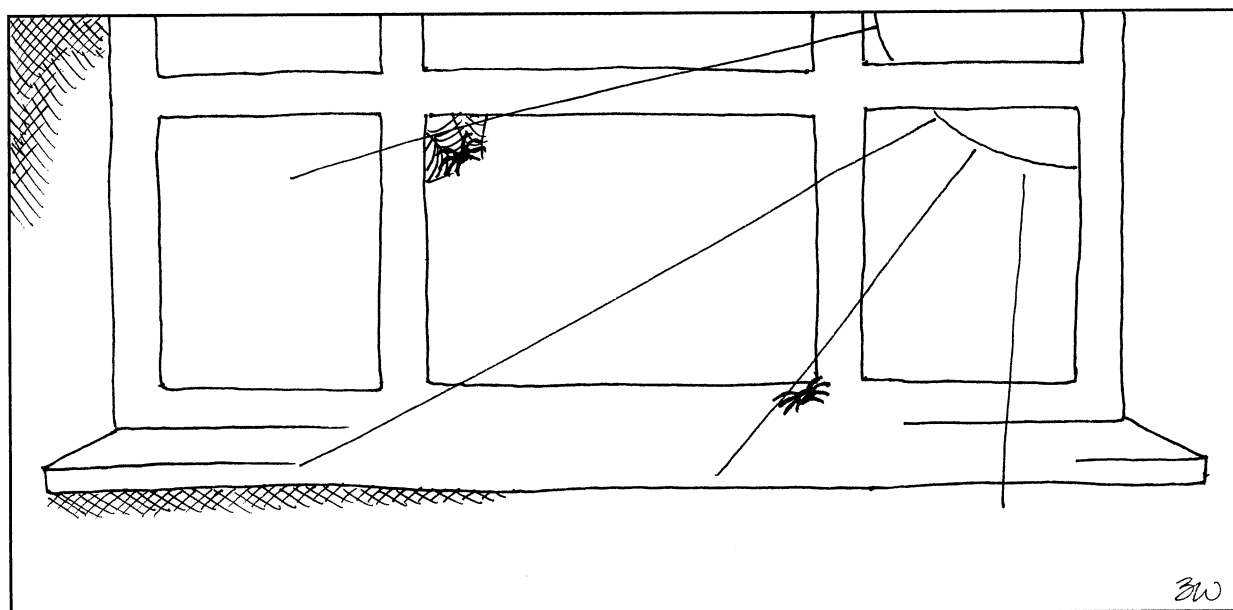
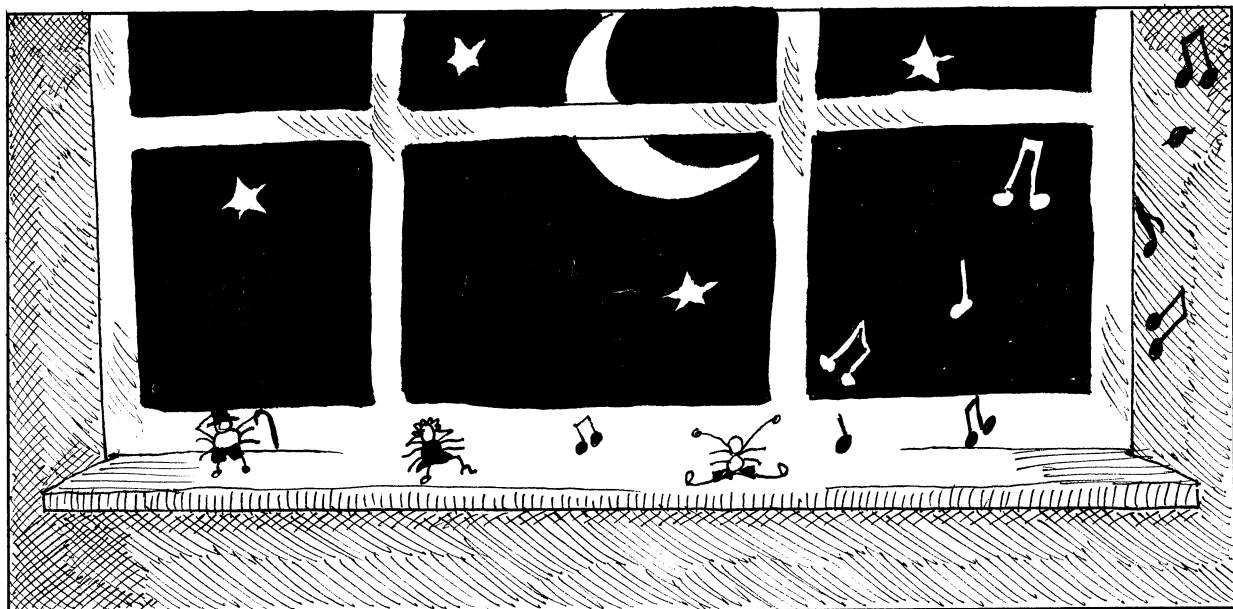
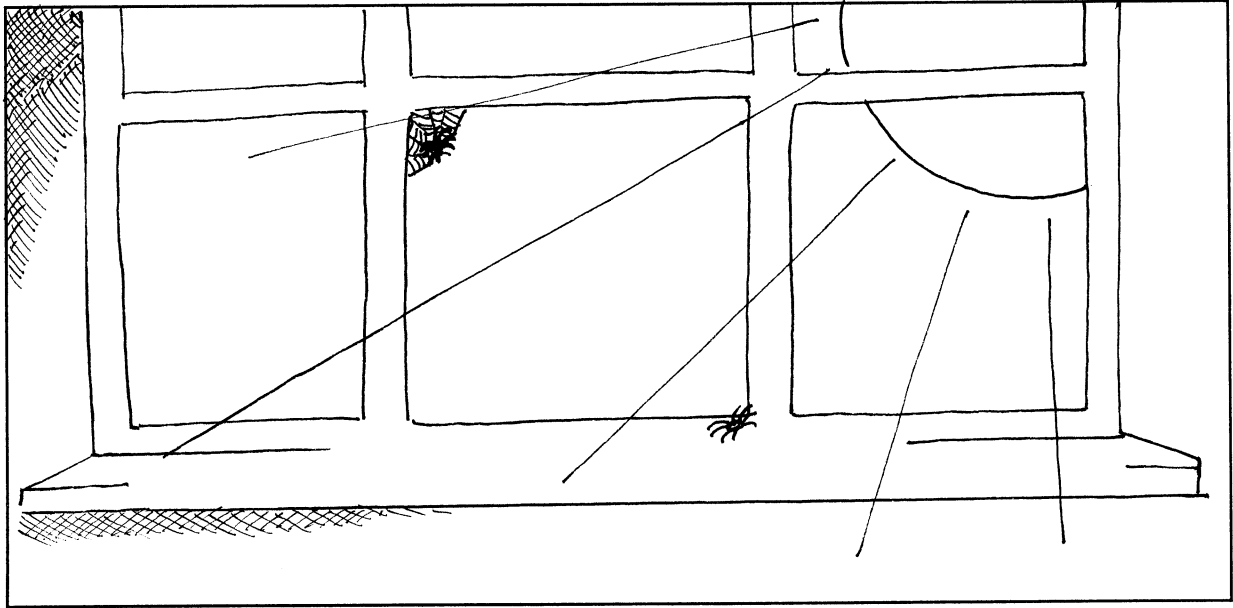




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