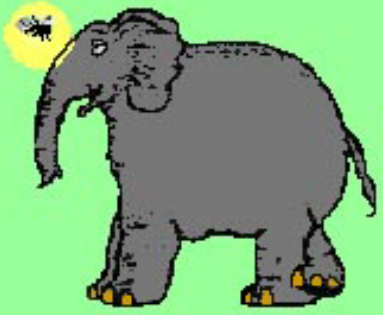
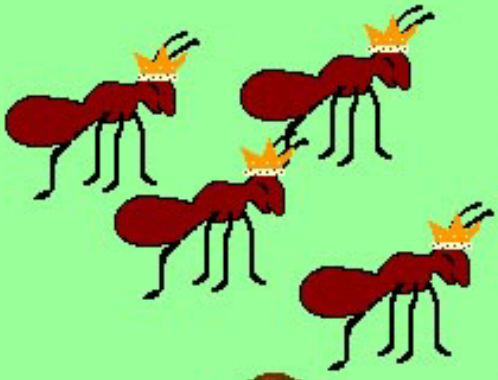
The Hummingbird Story Teller



Four Stories for Children



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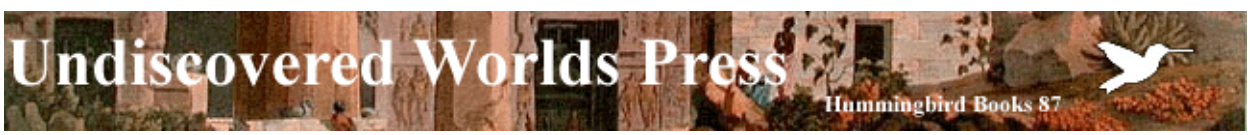

Undiscovered Worlds Press
Box 715
Glen Ellen, CA 95442

admin@undiscoveredworldspress.com

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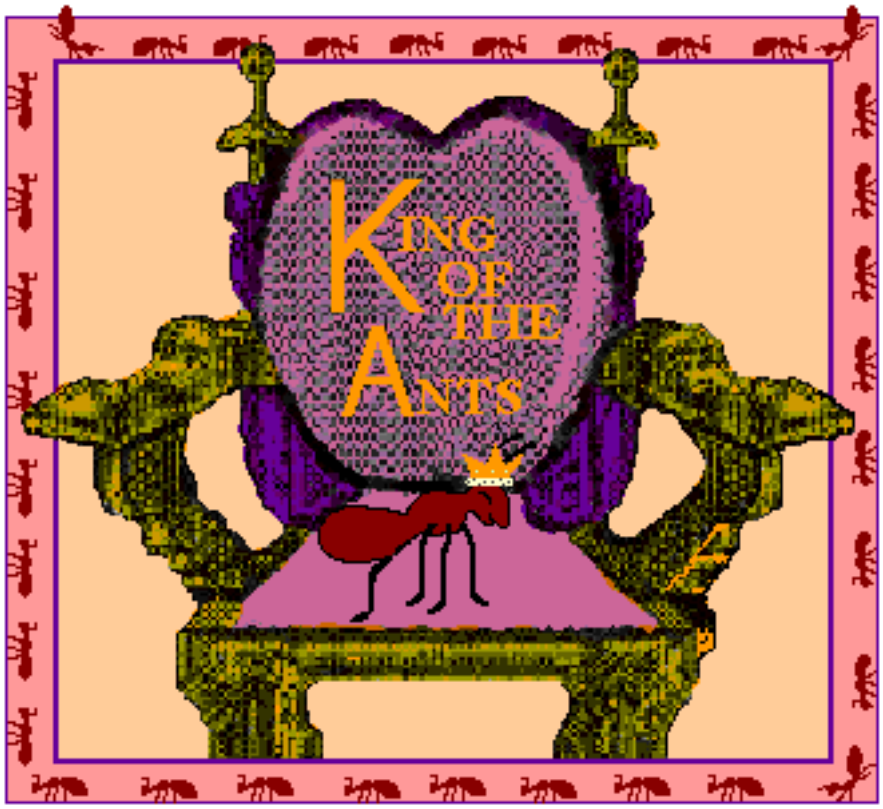
Illustrated by Hartley Paul Healey
Colorized by Stephanie Healey-Hopwood



King of the Ants

This is the story about six ants. They lived in an old tree trunk by the side of the road, and worked very hard making it neat and tidy. Maybe as anthills go it was not very impressive, but to them there was nothing like it anywhere.

They always worked the same way. Three ants going in, and three ants coming out. That way there are no arguments, and each one knew what he had to do.

Then one of the ants began thinking.

“This is a very well planned place where we live, with no quarreling, snapping, and pushing, like there is in most places. It can’t be an accident, someone must be organizing it. We must have a king.”

He thought about it, and he thought about it, and for the life of him he could not think who it could be.

"It can't be Arthur over there, he's too stupid, and it can't be Albert, he's never had a thought in his head in his life. It can't be that Irish ant Shamus either. He couldn't organize a row of ducks across the road."

So he had another think, and the more he pondered over it, the more he was convinced that the only person it could be was himself. To start with, it made him feel a very humble sort of ant. He did his work a little better because of it, and looked with affection at the other ants, thinking to himself, "These poor ants. If only they knew who was amongst them, they would be overcome with embarrassment."

But after a while he secret pleasure out of it. "Here I am, an ant of royal blood working beside these common ants. Of course, my work is much better than theirs, but one has to make allowances for such low class creatures."

Later the novelty began to wear off, and he found it humiliating hiding his true identity. He felt he ought to have a little more credit for the wonderful way the nest was organized. But he suppressed these ungenerous thoughts, and worked a little harder than usual.

Then a terrible thought struck him. What would happen if there was a calamity?

Supposing there was a flood, or some animal attacked them? These poor ants would not know what to do, they would run about in panic and some of them might get killed. He realized it was his duty to tell them who he was.

So he called them together and said, "Has it ever occurred to you that we have a very well organized nest here? Nothing ever goes wrong. We must have a king."

The ants looked at him in amazement.

"We are only six," said the one called Arthur.

"What do we need a king for?"

"My dear ant," said the one who had called them together. "Obviously it cannot be you if you say such a stupid thing. Every one of us has a job to do, and we do it without any argument. Someone must have arranged it, so we must have a king."

The ants started discussing who their king could be. One thought it might be the old tree trunk in which they lived, another thought it was the sun, and one of them suggested it was the motor cars that thundered down the road.

The first ant held up his hand for silence.

"It is none of these things," he said. "I have given the matter much thought, and I have discovered who our king is. It is I."

"You!" cried the other ants indignantly. "Why should you be our king? You are just an ignorant common ant the same as we are."

Then they all started shouting and quarreling amongst themselves.

"I am king," said one. "I have felt it for a long time, but I did not like to say anything."

"No, I am king!"

"No, no. I am!"

Then they were at it again, fighting and strutting up and down, shouting, "Here comes your king! Out of my way!"

In no time at all the nest was in a terrible state. The walls started falling down, the rubbish was never taken out, and no one did any work.

The ants lolled about in the sun, muttering , "Why should I do anything? Kings don't work."

Goodness knows what would have happened if the first ant had not gone off to have another think. He had another brilliant idea. He called the others together, and said to them, "I have been

doing some more thinking, and I really have discovered who our king is this time."

They all looked at him suspiciously, expecting some sort of trick.

"Who do you think is our king?" they asked, ready to dispute it, not matter what he said.

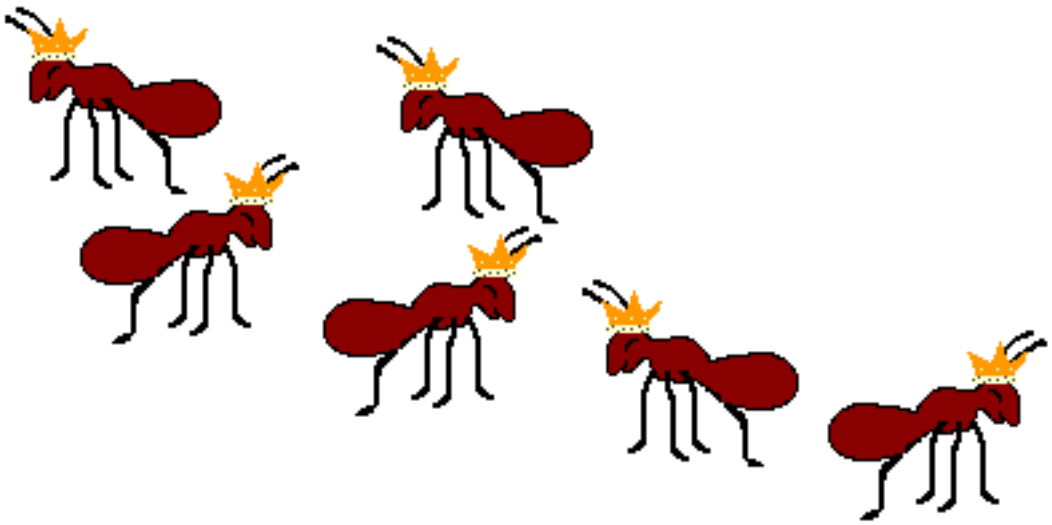
"We are all kings," said the first ant. "That is why our nest was so well organized."

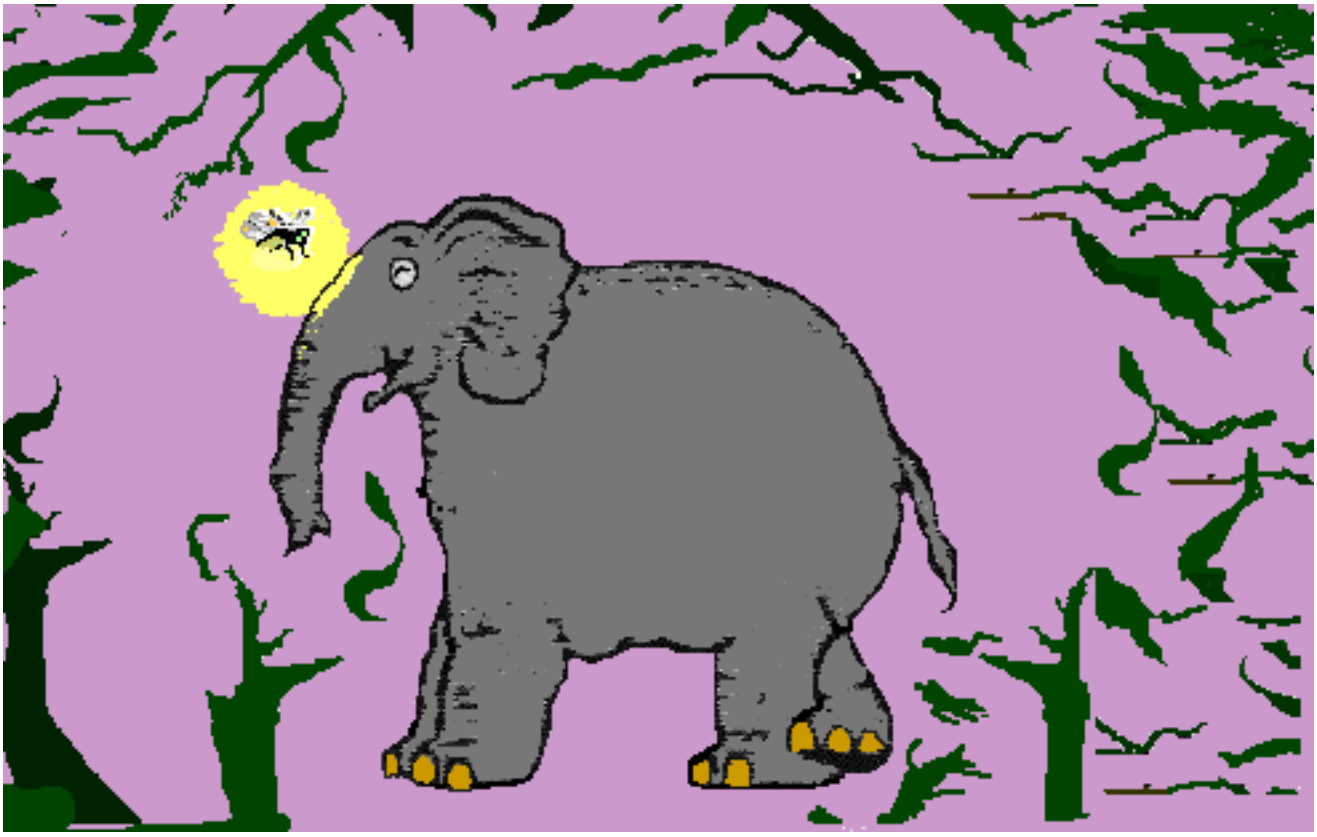
The others were delighted with this answer.

"Of course, that is why we work so well together. Kings understand each other."

They all went back to work, but this time they worked a little harder than before. After all, they had to show the common ants how kings could work.

Hubert Collis





The Elephant & The Firefly

Down in the jungle, an elephant was feeling very bored and alone.

"Nothing ever happens here," he thought to himself.

One night, while munching on some cane, he looked up and saw a strange radiant firefly flying from place to place.

The next day, as he lumbered to work, he could not stop thinking of that wonderful luminous creature. After work, he hurried back to the edge of the jungle where he had first seen it. Peering through the trees, he waited to catch sight of that beautiful creature.

Finally, in the cool twilight hours, he saw it appear. To his delight, it flew in circles around him, displaying its wonderful

light. All the next day, he could think of nothing else. He waited for the sunset with his heart pounding.

This time, it alit on his trunk, allowing him to gaze into its wonderful light.

How could a thing so tiny be so beautiful and move so gracefully? He felt so huge, so clumsy, it made him feel very sad. But at every sunset, he hurried back to see it dance again.

One evening, he noticed that it flew in ever larger circles, going further and further away from him. He crashed through the brush trying to keep up. But the more he ran after it, the farther away it flew.

No matter how he lumbered after it, he could not keep up. He was saddened and shed a tear. What could this mean? Did the firefly not realize it was flying too far?

But suddenly he saw the way of it. Timidly, he extended a huge foot, and cautiously he lifted his other three and began to twirl.The firefly made a circle and flew back, weaving in and out with the steps he made. He was still puzzled, but he realized he was dancing, a happy dance. On and on into the night he danced.

The other elephants were startled from their slumbers and came to see what all the crashing around was about. They lifted their trunks and trumpeted in bewilderment. They could hardly believe their eyes when they saw an elephant dancing with a firefly.

And the elephant and the firefly danced on and on. The other elephants came nearer and nearer until one by one they too began to twirl and dance. The firefly flew higher and higher and the elephant dance went on and on.

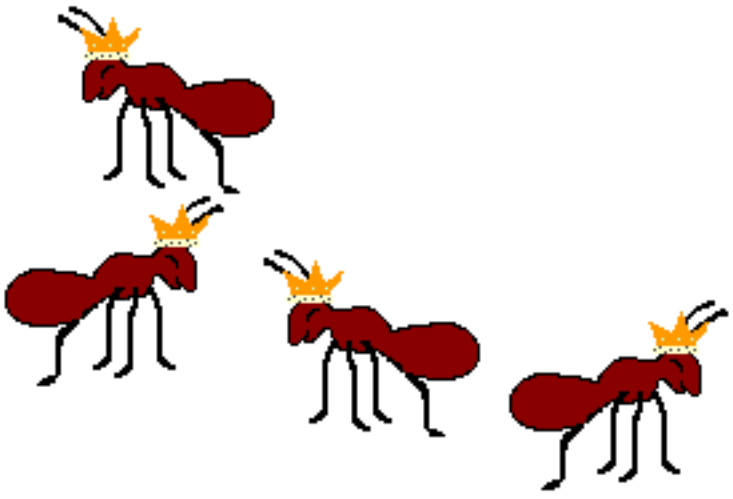
The dawn was turning the sky orange and pink. The first elephant was happier than he had ever been in his life. All the other elephants realized that they too had never been so happy. The first elephant looked around for the firefly. Where was that wonderful

creature? He started to feel very alone and sad.

But the other elephants pointed with their trunks, trumpeting, “Look! Look!”

He squinted and looked and sure enough above the rising sun he saw the glow of a beautiful star. Of course! It was the natural home for such a creature. From then on, when he felt alone, he had only to search the morning or evening sky for the light bringing star which is the home of his wonderful luminous friend.

Rachman & Stephanie Hopwood



The Old Gate

The wooden gate was very old, moss had settled on him, and various insects had eaten into his bones and made their home there. His paint had gone, and when he swung in the wind his hinges creaked horribly. He was no longer the gate he used to be.

Past him ran the road, and by his side was the tree, large and tall, with stout branches which whipped themselves into a violent dance when the wind blew.

The gate remembered well when the tree was planted. He had been a slim sapling who bowed his head to the ground in the March storms, and seemed unlikely to survive the seasons, which brought new terrors to a young and inexperienced tree. The gate

had given him good advice: “Never resist the wind, let i have its way for a few hours, then it will pass.” To show the sapling what he meant, he would swing back and forth with a bang and a clatter.

In those days he had smooth well oiled hinges which could swing with the best of them, but not now. The wind could hardly move him any more, and when it did he made a horrible grinding noise.

He had seen the sapling through many a difficult time. Now the sapling had grown into a tall tree where squirrels and birds took refuge and was an important member of the community. The people in the village used him to give directions.

“Go as far as the tree...” they would say. He was now a landmark like the church, the public house, and the post office. He mattered.

But no one ever mentioned the gate. Most of the time he hung open, because his hinges were so rusty he could not shut properly. No one used his latch these day, and that grand notice

PRIVATE
KEEP OUT

he wore when he was first made had fallen off.

Now they either kicked him open, or jumped over him. In the old days no one would have dared to do that.

In his declining years, his pleasures were small, the sun warmed his weary bones, there was the companionship of the lichen that had settled on his frame, and an occasional word with the tree. He also liked watching the road. In the old days, little boys had bowled hoops along it, now it was skate boards or roller skates, but the boys had not changed. The gate liked the boys who sometimes came to swing on him.

Thinking it over, however, the gate decided he did not like the tree very much. The tree should have assumed the dignity of a highly respected member of the community, but it only needed a little breeze to start him dancing. If there was a real wind he went mad, completely losing control of himself. The gate disapproved.

"Son, you'll get yourself into trouble one of these days if you carry on like that. That's no way for a successful tree to behave. Look at the oak at the other end of the village, you see him dancing around like a feather brained poppy."

But the tree took notice of the decrepit gate. His leaves swayed in the wind, turning this way and that as the breeze caressed them. He was such a strong tree, with mighty branches that reached up to the sky, and every passing year he grew a little more. He reveled in his health. There was nothing he could not achieve. In a hundred years his branches could cover the road, in a thousand the whole common. He would grow forever.

One day the gate saw a party of ants approaching. They were marching in an orderly manner up the pavement. They paused opposite the gate, turned sharply to his right like well trained soldiers, and marched up the gatepost, and into a hole near the top where his wood had rotted away.

The gate sighed. The hole had been an embarrassment to him for a long time. It was a reminder of his age. If ants could use it, why shouldn't they? Even in one's old age one can be useful. If the ants lived there, the hole would come and put in a new post, but no one had bothered.

Every morning the ants would go trampling down the road on their daily tasks, and would come back in the evening carrying useful things for their new home. The gate occasionally told them about places where they could find what they wanted. The ants never appeared grateful, but they always followed his advice.

One evening they came back very agitated. They packed up

everything and prepared to leave.

"Where are you going?" asked the gate.

The ants hesitated, reluctant to offend the old gate. But they said, "There's a gale coming, and we are not sure you can stand up to it. So we are moving into the wall beside you. We hope you will be all right, but we cannot take the risk."

The gate scoffed at them.

"I have weathered hundreds of storms, they mean nothing to me. Why, I remember the gale of '65. Hurricane, it really was. Hadn't been one like it for a hundred years. I just swung it out like I always do. Did plenty of damage though. A young tree was blown down across the way. Hedges were torn up, and there were tiles all over the place, terrible mess. But when I was a young gate we were made to weather such things. Good seasoned timber they used in those days, not like now. Those cheap gates of plastic and green wood they make today will only last one winter. But a stout gate of weathered wood will last forever."

He rattled his bars to illustrate the point. But the ants were not convinced. They still went off to the wall leaving the gate muttering to itself.

Young saplings were permanently bowed under it, broken branches danced down the road. Boys came out laughing and shouting to roller skate against the wind. But it became too strong for them, and they turned and flew homewards with the wind. Tins, rubbish, and dustbins began to somersault past the gate, and painfully he began to swing on his hinges. In the end the rust wore away, and he swung more easily.

"I do believe I'm getting younger," he muttered with pleasure, and banged away to warn everyone about the gale.

The big tree trembled with pleasure, and threw up his head sniffing at the violence in the air. His thick boughs began to sway laboriously, his young branches whipped and cracked, and birds

moved uneasily amongst his leaves. He listened eagerly to the musical howl of the gale. A mighty gale for a mighty tree! Rain came, and the music rose to a scream. The tree lashed himself into a wild dance, straining at his roots, and beating his branches on the ground until with a thunderous crack, his largest branch went sailing through the air, smashing everything in its path.

At last the wind died, and the tree stood leaning drunkenly to one side, branches sagging with exhaustion. The men came up

from the village and stood around him.

"That big branch did a lot of damage," said one.

"The tree doesn't look safe to me," said another. "Another gale like that and someone could get killed. It had better come down." So they cut the tree down.

The old gate watched, and shivered a little. He had ridden out the storm. One of his hinges had broken, but he still stood there, not quite upright, but still guarding the path. One of the men looked at him.

"I remember this old gate. Must be fifty years old and still standing." He gave it an affectionate pat, and the gate wobbled weakly to one side.

"Broken hinge," said the man. "The storm did it. About time he had some new ones, he's earned them."

They cut up the tree which went to make furniture. They gave the gate new well oiled hinges, and he swung as sprightly as in his youth.

Soon after, the ants came back, and when there was a gale they never thought of moving.They knew the old gate would weather any storm.

In the village, when they gave directions, they always said, "Go as far as the old gate..."

They never mentioned the stump of the tree.

Hubert Collis

The Flute Player

Far away and long ago in a distant land lived a flute player.

Young and old loved his music. When he played, the cares and worries of this life were forgotten. He was now gray in years and looked forward to teaching his grandson the marvels of his

music.

He gave his grandson a beautiful flute. No one knew where this flute had come from, only that it had been a treasured possession in the family, generation after generation.

Day after day the boy went to his grandfather for lessons. One would think that with all that training and a beautiful instrument that the sound he made would be pleasing to hear. But every time the boy began to play, people would stick their fingers in their ears. Instead of beautiful melodies, he would produce the most awful pips and squeaks. People would run away from the sound and even the birds flew out of earshot. No matter how hard the grandfather tried to teach the boy, he could only produce the most discordant sounds.

In desperation the villagers came to the old grandfather and said, “Dear grandfather, surely it is clear that the boy has no talent for music. Would it not be better if he took up a new occupation and you find someone else to play the flute?”

The old grandfather carefully considered what the villagers said. But he saw way beyond all the squeaks that the boy now made, to a whole world of beautiful melodies sleeping inside the boy. The old grandfather reflected deeply on the situation and one morning he called the boy to him.

“You know my grandson that I have relatives in a distant part of the country and I think it is now time for you to visit them.”

The boy bundled up his clothes and the old grandfather presented him with a horse.

The boy sadly left the flute with his grandfather and set out on his long journey. The horse galloped forward and in two strides the village was left far behind. Day and night the boy and horse traveled, the boy clinging to the flowing mane in fear of being blown away as the wind whistled around. The sun warmed their days, and at night all the stars of the Milky Way, shone soft on their path.

One day the horse slowed to a canter, stopping by an old ruined house. The house was large and timbered, and leaning over to one side. It seemed to the boy that it would topple over at any minutes. The windows were caked with black dust. Pushing open the decaying front door, the boy held his breath at the terrible stench. He was about to run from the house, when from afar the wind tugged at his sleeve and quietly said,

"Sweep, sweep, sweep that floor!
Clean, clean, clean those dishes!"

In the evil smelling house it was pitch dark. At the center of the first room, the boy could just make out the outline of a figure hunched in a chair. His heart nearly stopped, and icy fingers clutched at him in the darkness. Before him, he saw an old woman

dressed in rotting rags and covered with dirty cobwebs. The boy stifled a scream of terror and was about to run from the house when again the wind tugged gently at his sleeve, and once again he heard the words,

"Sweep, sweep, sweep that floor!
Clean, clean, clean those dishes!"

Feeling his way through the gloom, the boy saw a large broom leaning against the wall. He picked it up, but to his horror the broom jumped back, leapt into the air and swiped him hard on the head, "Crack."

"Oh my head," cried the boy. He was about to run from the house, when again he felt the wind tug gently at his sleeve, and once again he heard the words,

"Sweep, sweep, sweep that floor!
Clean, clean, clean those dishes!"

Rushing forward, the boy gripped the broom and to his great relief, this time, it submitted to his grasp. The boy started sweeping the dust from the floor. But the dust seemed most reluctant to go! A thousand dusty voices cried out:

"Leave us where we have fallen,
leave us in peace."

The boy paid no heed and continued sweeping. The dust swept itself into a roaring tornado. Soon, he couldn't see and couldn't hear he was drowning in a great swirling sea of angry

black dust. He was about to loosen his grip on the broom, when in this black nightmare the wind again tugged at his sleeve and said,

"Sweep, sweep, sweep that floor!
Clean, clean, clean those dishes!"

The boy tightened his grip on the broom as the house begin to shake. He felt his last moment had arrived, but struggling to the door, he managed to sweep the first dust out of the house. And the wind rushed down, spreading the dust far and wide.

Gradually, the boy created a place to work. It was now easier to sweep out the dust. Opening the windows, he was astonished to see in the thin yellowish light a room that once had been beautiful.

At the end of the room, he heard something scratch against the door. The door opened and a great wolf hound sprang forward a bit deep into his arm. Gasping in pain, he dropped the broom. But the broom mounted into the air and struck the hound down with one mighty blow.

Seeing that the wolf was dead, the boy hurriedly bandaged his arm. Going into the kitchen, he saw plates, cups and rotting food piled to the ceiling. The cups and plates slid right down over him and he was lost in a huge mountain of dirty crockery!

Once again the wind tugged at his sleeve and he heard a calm voice, saying,

"Sweep, sweep, sweep that floor!
Clean, clean, clean those dishes!"

In the corner, he found the water tap, but nothing happened when he turned it on! He tried again and saw only one drop trickle

down. But he found an old cloth and started to clean the first plate in sight. When the cloth was dry, he went back to the tap. This time, two drops fell and he was able to clean a few more plates. He carried on like this until finally fresh water gushed from the tap. As he cleaned, the drops of water sang,

"From the clouds we come
Sailing down through the air
Meeting our sisters of the earth
In joy and laughter."

Soon the boy had cleaned all the crockery and neatly placed the shining pots and pans on to the shelves. From behind, he heard a rustling and turning, he saw the old woman stirring in the chair. To his amazement, she was now a young girl, and she called to him,

"Sweep, sweep, sweep that floor!
Clean, clean, clean those dishes!"

The girl cried out when the boy helped her struggle up from the chair, because she was so weak. His heart melted and he was afraid of hurting her, but each time he stopped, the girl cried out,

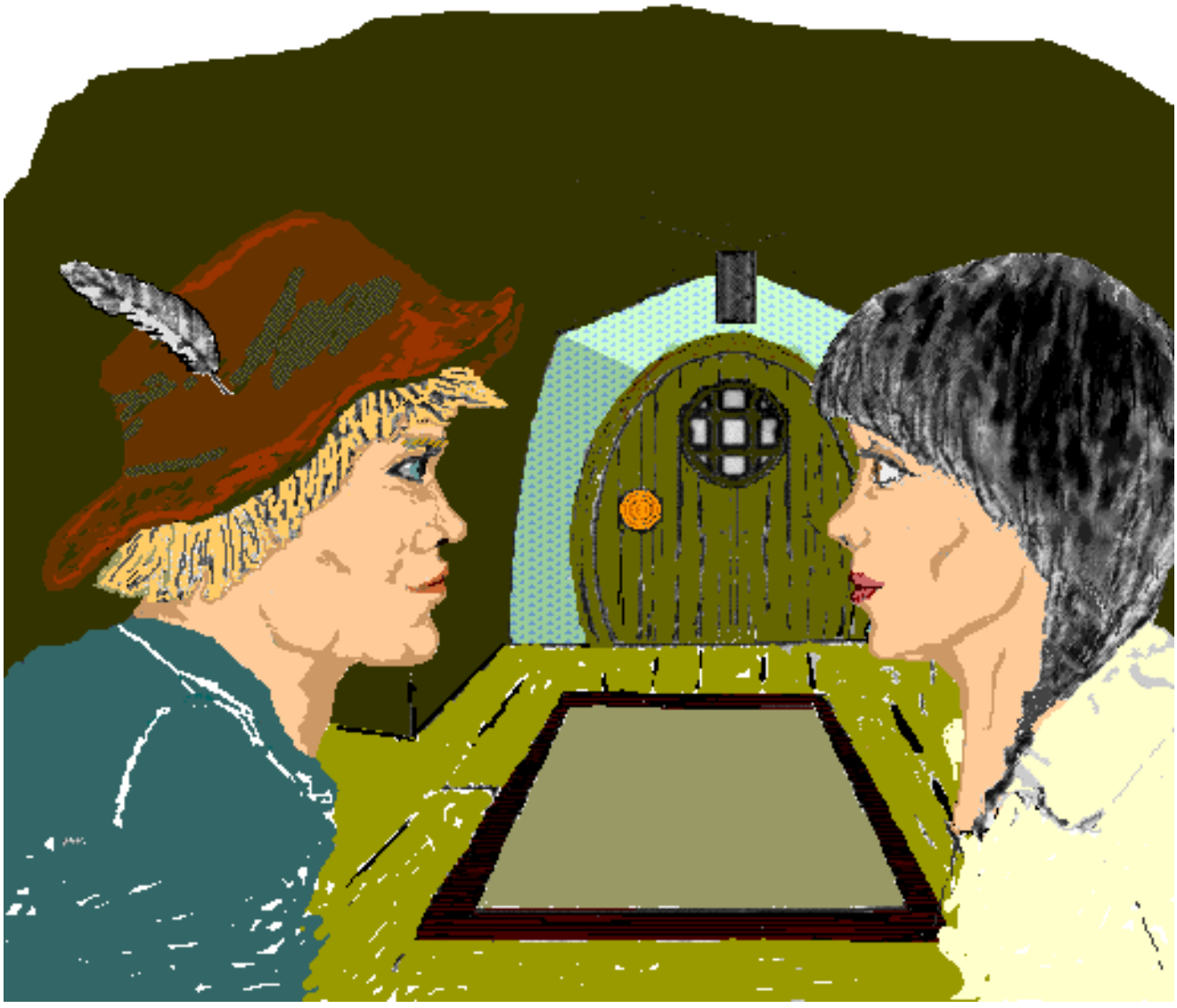
"Please take me to the water,
please take me to the water."

He half carried her to the tap and went back to another room which was still very dirty. The floor was pitch black with dirt. As the boy swept he saw beneath the dirt a lovely soft golden stone. Working on, he revealed other colored stones. Soon he stood on a

beautiful mosaic floor, which had been lost under the dust. He was about to drag away the dead wolf when he saw that it had changed into a very much alive sheep dog.With a friendly wag of his tail, he ambled through the door to the kennel behind the house.

Last of all, the boy polished the windows. Ah! How good it was to see the sunlight streaming through the house. He sat back exhausted, it was as if he had been cleaning and sweeping for a thousand years! Tired but happy, it was soothing just to sit quietly in the now calm and beautiful house.

The kitchen door opened and out stepped the girl, who had asked for water. Her eyes were radiant and she wore a lovely long



blue dress and stars were falling all about her. Gently, she came to the boy and took both his hands in hers and said,

"My heart is full of gratitude for what you have done. But for your coming, I would have been lost for all eternity."

Looking out the door, the boy saw his horse in the sunlight and remembered his journey.

Taking his flute from the saddle bag, he sat on the grass and started to play. His heart had only time to skip a beat, but this time a beautiful melody issued from his flute. The girl and the horse listened enraptured and the sheep dog came from behind the house to sit in front of the boy and listen.

When the melody was finished, the girl fixed him in a bed for the night and bandaged his arm. In the morning they locked up the house and started out across the green countryside for the boy's home.

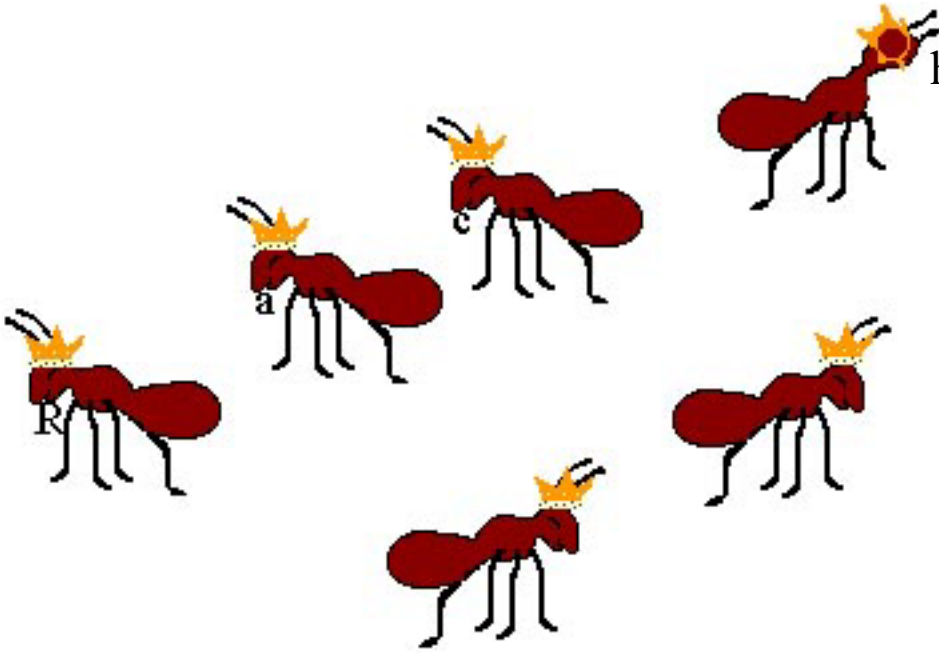
The horse bore them through the swirling winds and they arrived a the village. All of the villagers were astonished to see the boy again and the beautiful girl who was with him, not to mention the strange sheep dog who followed them.

The old grandfather was delighted and beckoned them into the courtyard of his house. Under the shade of the almond blossom, the boy took his flute, and many of the villagers covered their ears while some started to move quickly away.

The boy laughed and began to play. Again a beautiful melody filled the air, a melody even more beautiful than the first.

The grandfather beamed with happiness and the villagers who were hurrying away stopped in mid stride and turned back in wonderment. From that day forward the boy became the village flute player and the grandfather sat beneath the snowy almond and dozed in the sun.

In all the wide world, this village was famous for the boy, who was their own flute player. In years to come, the villagers for-

got the boy who made the most discordant noise they had ever heard.

The boy and girl were married and journeyed along a wondrous path and maybe by now they have reached the House of Happiness.