

Greg Cohen
POB 630158
Lanai City, Hawaii 96763
gcacme@wave.hicv.net

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A Little Knowledge

I am outside now, so I'm happy, even though I just walked by where it happened. I said "Good morning" to the trees and they said, "Hi, Carla!" back to me in their thick voices so heavy and slow that I was almost out of the yard while they were still talking. But I wasn't rude. They are glad to see me even if it's just *too* hard for me to sit still and really visit with them. This morning, after Daddy ate his breakfast and teased me and Anna the way he does with a light in his eye, he kissed us all, Mommy especially, and said, "Time to go, troops! I've got people to see, things to do!" The trees know I feel the same way.

There is so much to love in the world! I never have enough hours in the day, as Gramma always says. I just learned how right she is and though that makes part of me sad, the rest is still happy at the sight of white clouds over the mountains that by lunchtime, will be close enough to share their shapes with me. The sun is bright as a hope. I'm tickled by the grass that feels so good, I used to worry about walking on it until the trees told me that grass liked being a cushion for little girls' feet almost as much as being combed by the wind, so I go barefoot whenever I can and with every step, I say a little "hello" to all the tiny stems.

But it's even easier to talk to the animals! I talk to them all. There is Reg the cat, who sees everything, knows all. The animals say that Reg is nicer to me than he is to any of them. Daddy would say, "That's high praise, indeed!" and I felt all warm inside the first time Freda told me. Freda is Daddy's old cow dog from when he had a ranch before I was even a thought. Her black and white face sparkles with silver hair and while Reg *knows* everything, it is Freda we all turn to for advice. What happened is a good reason why.

Yesterday morning a man came to our house. The sky was barely blue when I heard his truck pull in. I sat up on my bunk bed but couldn't see high enough out the window. Anna, being the oldest, gets the top bunk and this was one of those times I was mad at her for that, but I was excited about someone coming so early, with Daddy and Mommy as sound asleep as Anna. I climbed up on Anna's desk and watched the man close the door and disappear behind his truck. I thought he was a magician come to put on a show, but then I saw his feet under the truck, and was sad. Even normal people can be worth watching though, so I watched.

Racer, my bird, heard me up though I hadn't made a sound and he sang the "good morning" song from under his cage cover. I turned and pulled the hood and he was so glad to see me and the sun that he couldn't even sing, just preened himself and strutted back and forth, back and forth on his little swinging perch, all excited. We watched the man lay a thing as tall as a tree against the truck, and put on a big belt with lots of shiny things in it. They're called.... Tules.

I learned that word the day I found the wonderful tule that was all curves

except for one long line with a neat row of little teeth like mine but sharper, all of them stuck grinning. Daddy saw me smiling back at it in my hand and I'd never seen him move so fast. I felt him before he even took a step, and it was like when the big storm came and we all went down to play in the basement, even Daddy and Mommy, and how, when all of a sudden it went quiet and in a funny tone of voice, Daddy said, "We're right in the eye of it."

I was right in the eye of something that day in the garage, too, and the only reason the spanking didn't really hurt was because all I kept seeing was how fast Daddy'd moved to the workbench, all I could feel was how hard he'd grabbed it from my hand, as if there were... like *ten* daddies there inside of him at once, all of them making this one thing happen...or not happen. I felt that, too.

So I know the "eye" feeling from a couple of times before, but when I felt it as we watched the man with the funny tree that he could carry in one hand and the belt with tules in it, I didn't know if I should be scared, or what. I looked at Racer and he hopped to the cage door and wanted out. I knew he felt it, too. I opened the little door, liking the tiny *latch*, Daddy called it; liking the way I was the only one in the house whose fingers were just the right size to turn it. Racer as good as told me to put such silly thoughts out of my head and pecked me a little in the neck to show me which way to go. Though I could tell which side of the house the man walked towards, I didn't let Racer know because we are good friends.

See, Reg sometimes slinks in or jumps up on the window ledge when Racer's in his cage and Reg just sits there meowing, "birdbrain... birdbrain..." which he

knows makes Racer so mad that he just starts sputtering, telling *everything* he knows just to show it's not true. Reg would never hurt or *eat* Racer, he knows he'd have something worse than Freda to face up to for that; he'd have to face me. But anyway, it's easy to see why I like to let Racer think sometimes he's the only one who knows what's going on.

He dug his little feet into my shoulder and I climbed down from the desk, careful not to fall because I'd land on my builder's blocks all over the floor and I already knew how much that could hurt. Besides, I didn't want to wake anybody up. Racer and I were on an adventure. The heavy sound of the man walking went past our bedroom and past the sound of Daddy's snore in their room. There was a loud thump! Then we heard thuds on the ceiling, kind of like thunder but not as boomy. Racer and I waited in the hall, both of us staring up as the sounds crossed right over us to the front of the house, went way back by the kitchen, and then came our way again until it was over Mommy and Daddy's room. We heard banging and then this great ripping sound and something fell to the ground, but on the side with no windows, so Racer and I couldn't see a thing. Daddy sort of moaned, "Oh god! The roofers start today...how do they *know* which room is the bedroom?" But then I heard him turn over and figured they were trying to stay in bed just like they do on Christmas mornings.

Racer and I went out to the kitchen and I gave him a fruit stick to chew on while I got down a box of sugar. One night Daddy came home kind of quiet, barely kissed me or called me his little sugar. Later, when I was watching Big

Bird, I heard ice sing its song into his glass for the second time and Mommy said, "You're making *another* drink? Are you okay, Ralph?" I'll never forget the way he looked at her, talking like the animals do, with their eyes, and he said, "Honey, sometimes dealing with people all day makes me take a little pleasure in doing something that's not good for me."

She went to him and they hugged and the room got lighter and I went back to Big Bird. But yesterday morning, there was something about the "eye" feeling everywhere that made me feel just like Daddy did that night he made the another drink. And, if there was anything I knew, it was that sugar wasn't good for me. It was the white kind too, which I don't like as much as the crumbly brown kind, but I made do, as Gramma says.

I thought of turning on the TV but Racer whiffed his wings and I knew the TV would close me in from everything else and though we were kind of scared, we hung on in the silent morning, Racer nibbling at his fruit stick and me sucking wet fingers of sugar. The sound of the man on the roof worked its way down along the back of the house until he was right over us. I went to the back door and looked up through the window made, like all the others, for everybody in this house but me.

I saw his hands, big with rough, dirty knuckles that reminded me of the big black monkey we'd seen at the zoo that Mommy said was called a "gorilla". I'd been too afraid to try and talk to *him*. Racer and I watched the hands like the gorilla's but without fur. They'd jump out past the edge of the roof fast, as fast as

Reg could jump when he was stalking a bug. I could see the fingers holding, tugging big sheets of something from the roof, then they'd disappear and we'd hear a flap! sound and there would be the little squares from the roof, but they didn't look so little lying there in a growing pile on the grass.

I was starting to get bored, wondering if I'd been wrong about the "eye" feeling when all of a sudden, the man came flying past the edge of the roof, head first. It all happened so fast, but it took forever for him to fall, too. I saw his hair was long and colored like our broom. His shirt and pants looked soft, like they were made of the same stuff but different shades. He reached his hands out ahead of him but bright tules started to fall from his belt and the hands hurried to catch them. His eyes caught mine on the way down. Racer and I both heard him say "Help!" and lots more, though his lips didn't move. He landed on the flagstone. I don't know why they call it that. It doesn't look anything like the flag to me.

I saw it all. I was on my tiptoes so my nose was pressed up against the glass and the bottom of the window. His forehead and cheek hit first and even through the closed door, Racer and I heard a funny, sick kind of noise. The rest of him fell like my little puppets when you let go of one of the strings, just moved all by itself. Then it was super quiet and I knew we were really in the eye then.

Racer was pacing back and forth, back and forth on my shoulder. I saw Reg creep up slowly outside, his belly so close to the ground you couldn't see any light and he moved in that funny way cats can so it looks like they're not moving

at all until you notice they're not in the same spot they were the last time you looked. I tapped the glass to let him know I was there and he froze, then gave me a dark look that let me know how much I'd scared him.

He went back to circling the fallen man, sniffing carefully. Reg touched a paw out softly, testing, touching the man's legs and back here and there but nothing happened. He got around to the head and got all stiff, his whiskers pulling back in a scary hiss. He lifted his right front paw as if it had been burned, sniffed it, and backed away from the man, leaving a little line of single tiny red paw-prints that faded as he got to the grass.

The man moved a little, and Reg drew back farther under Mommy's rose bushes. I saw one of the man's eyes flutter like a butterfly wing and then it was open. Though it looked like rock candy, I knew it was staring at me. I felt him calling me, calling me. I couldn't stand it. I put Racer where he could get a perch in the window sill though he screamed at me "Stay inside! Stay inside!" I went to the man. His shoulder was as tall as me. I looked down at him. His eye was closed now, he looked asleep, but I could feel his arm wanting to reach out to me from where it lay on the ground. I knelt down and tried to pick it up, but even with both hands, it was too heavy and I fell on my butt. Holding that big hand in my two little ones, all of a sudden I felt the man *talking* to me like the animals and the trees do! He sent me pictures and in them, he was the same man but better somehow, nicer, and his face wasn't hurt. He smiled down and looked inside me the way the animals can. He knew my name, and told me his...Loid. I

told him I liked the sound of it and he smiled again. He told me to go get Daddy. I ran over to the door like there was no tomorrow, but it had locked behind me! Racer was going crazy there, looking out at me. I ran to Daddy and Mommy's window and yelled, but my throat was dry and tight. My voice was thin and tiny and nobody looked out. I tried to throw sticks and little rocks at it, but they all fell down before they got there. I was screaming now and could feel the hot of tears in my eyes. I was surprised when I knew they'd been there for awhile but I'd just noticed them. I thought to ring the doorbell, but couldn't open the gate of the backyard. I ran back to Loid and squeezed his hand. Out loud I was saying, "Tell me what to do, Loid! Tell me! Tell me!" I saw a little pool of red rising around his face and I couldn't feel anything at all except maybe that the big eye had come down to look right through me.

It was then I felt Reg and Racer both thinking hard at me, "Freda....Freda...". I ran back to the kennel and she was waiting for me at the gate, panting hard and her eyes bright like I'd never seen them. She ran ahead of me and without a bit of the limp that she's had to get shots for at the vets'. Anna's pony, Princess Buttercup, was snorting and I caught her hoping the wind would change. I still don't know why she'd be thinking about the old wind at such a moment. Freda was sniffing at Loid. Racer was frozen in the window, Reg under the rosebush, the three of them making like a little bright triangle around the man.

I knew then that Loid had to wake up. That was what they wanted. Freda licked his face and we all knew even that little touch hurt him. He moaned but

that was all. Freda began nudging him hard, with her lips drawn back. She snarled like she does when warning Reg about getting too close. I knew she wanted me and walked over next to Loid.

I looked up and saw us in the glass of the screen door. Freda, bent and busy at Loid's poor face and me, my knees shaking, a little red stain on my Mickey Mouse shorts and my brown eyes open so wide they looked like all there was in my face. I took his hand and felt how much Freda was hurting him right away. It was hard not to make her stop. Racer and Reg helped me wait. Finally, he came back to me and he was still the young, happy Loid of last time, but he was sweating and his face was red. Then he told me things.

He showed me so many pictures that I was swept away like when Daddy took me on the roller coaster three times in a row because I just couldn't get enough. I saw a little boy Loid just my size with bright yellow hair playing out in a yard with a swing set and bushes with purple flowers that smell sweet at night. Loid started to show me the boy growing up but I felt him stop and touch inside me. Then, smiling, but looking like he was real tired, he went back and showed me every day that he was a little boy instead. That little Loid and I played and talked and watched the clouds and ate too many green apples and he had forgotten that he could ever talk to the animals! I asked him if that would happen to me and the little boy Loid said "Maybe...". I looked at big Loid, fighting the thought of not being with Freda or Racer or Reg when I felt them all thinking at us, wild, and knew they'd been trying for awhile.

As they showed both me and Loid how to think towards Daddy, I felt Loid almost laugh and he thought to me, "Never give up too soon, Carla." and then the five of us were like the wind or the sun or the clouds. Even the trees bent our way to help. We pushed ourselves inside, through the window, over to the bed, into Daddy's...heart... I think....and as I saw him sit up in bed, shouting out my name, we felt Loid fall away from us.

Then Daddy was at the back door, saying "Jesus Christ.... okay....Carla, come here to Daddy...everything's going to be alright."

I didn't see Mommy, but I heard her breathe in sharp behind him and her voice grew smaller into the house as she said, "I'm calling 911." I couldn't move and knew that I'd peed my pants. Daddy came outside real slow and he knelt down across from me, next to Loid. He looked straight into me. "You okay?" He asked, trusting me. I nodded yes and he picked up Loid's wrist and held it while he looked at the clock on his arm. "He's still alive. That's good." I hadn't noticed but I still had one hand in a fist where it had grabbed a handful of Freda's hair on her back and Daddy reached over and gently unbent my fingers one by one. When I saw my hand let go, Freda sighed and shifted her weight off her bad leg. Daddy scratched her deep behind the ears and said, "Thanks for helping our little girl, Freda."

By then Anna was up and she looked around Mommy's waist in the door just as the ambulance men got there. Daddy picked me up and when he felt my wet pants, he just hugged me to him real tight. After what seemed a long time, one of

the men looked at Daddy and said, "He'll live. But I'm afraid he's going to need plastic surgery." They picked Loid up then, gentle as I would stroke Racer's tiny wings. One whole side of Loid's face was thick, blotchy red and I heard Anna go, "Yucchh....Freddie Krueger." Then Daddy turned to Mommy and said, "C'mon, these kids don't need to see this." I have a lot of questions about what happened with the big eye and with Loid. But I mostly wonder why Daddy said that. I suppose I better ask Freda.