

The Vulture & The Otter

By Dana Buck

Stop judging by appearances, and make a right judgment.

1 Corinthians 16:13 (NIV)

A sun touched strand of empty beach
Awakens with the morning
White shells, like broken necklaces
The rocky shore adorning

No footprints mar this virgin stretch
No tracks to north or south
A lazy creek concludes a journey
At its yawning mouth

Onto this canvas yet unmarked
Two figures breach the sand
Like the early brushstrokes first applied
By an artist's probing hand

A man, whose gait is strong and sure
A girl upon his shoulders
In innocence she sought the ride
Not sure the sand would hold her

Now watching birds with each new wave
Advance and then retreat
She asks to be restored to earth
To test it with her feet

Obligingly he lifts her
Like a well instructed caddie
She jumps in place a time or two
With a smiling "Thank you Daddy"

They walk along then hand in hand
Her questions quick and bright
Like "where'd the moon go?"
For she saw it shining just last night

He told her that two octopus
Were fussing which was greater
They stretched their arms up toward the moon
And caught them in a crater

Distressed, they pulled with all they had
A mighty tugging motion
They yanked so hard that big old moon
Sank right into the ocean!

She loves the game of "asking Dad"
With questions, she'll regale
Because the answers always come
With a new and charming tale

She points at something just off shore
A creature sleek and black
"What's that Daddy? What's that there?"
"He's floating on his back!"

"Why that fine whiskered fellow"
He confided to his daughter
"Is none other than the ocean's prince"
"That's cuddly Tom the otter"

"He floats that way, upon his back"
"Without a care or fret"
"For he doesn't have to swim a stroke"
"Or get his moustache wet"

He was about to comment further
On this otter's great renown
When a dark and swooping shadow
Passed between them on the ground

Her head was raised up quickly
And she pointed to the sky
Where a large, dark bird was soaring
Effortlessly as it flies

Before she could ask a question
Daddy's hand waived wide and slow
"I wondered when that fellow"
"Would cruise by and say hello"

"You know him?" Asked his daughter
As the bird sailed passed a spruce
"Most certainly I do"
"Why, that's the vulture, name of Bruce"

She looked at him askance
Put little hands on little hips
Crinkled up her nose
And made a tight line with her lips

"Bruce and Tom are best of friends"
That comment paused and caught her
"You mean I've never told the tale"
"Of the Vulture and the Otter?"

"No" she said with hesitation
Glancing at the water
"Well, let's have a seat upon this log"
On his lap, he set his daughter

"It happened just last Spring"
"Or perhaps it was the Spring before"
"When two little girls were walking"
"And were playing on the shore"

"One girls had binoculars"
"That her mom and dad had bought her"

“They brought them to the ocean”
“So they could better watch the otters”

“They loved to see them dive and swim”
“In groups or all alone”
“Then lie upon their backs while”
“Cracking clams with little stones”

“They watched the otters for some time”
“And shared the field glasses”
“The animals seemed to perform”
“For these two lovely lasses”

“But their attention was diverted”
“When they heard a squawk and screech”
“There was quite a big commotion”
“From a spot just up the beach”

“There they saw an otter”
“(It turns out that this was Tom)”
“He was curled up on the sand”
“It’s clear that something here is wrong”

“Above him stood a bird”
“(And you guessed it, this is Bruce)”
“As he lowered his large head”
“The otter struggled to get loose”

“Wait a minute Daddy”
“You are such a silly goose”
“Just a tick or two ago”
“You said that Tom was friends with Bruce”

“Friends don’t hurt each other”
“So then why would Bruce mistreat him?”
“How can he be Tom’s good pal”
“If he’s going to try and eat him?”

“A valid observation”
Daddy says “And right you are”
“Friends should always love each other”
“Never hurt or scar”

“But growing up you’ll find”
“That life, it offers many themes”
“And one of those you’ll learn is”
“Things aren’t always what they seem”

A puzzled look came over her
She gazed at him perplexed
So Daddy said “Just listen”
“And I’ll tell you what comes next”

“One girl cried “It’s hurting him!”
“She raced quick down the beach”
“Stooping down to gather stones”
“That fell within her reach”

“The other, with binoculars”
“Fixed tightly to her eyes”
“Watched the scene unfold”
“And got one very big surprise”

“For the otter, she could see”
“Was under quite enormous threat”
“But it wasn’t from the vulture”
“He was caught up in a net!”

“And the buzzard wasn’t pecking”
“As he stood there on the sand”
“He was pulling on the mesh”
“Why, he was trying to break the strands”

“But the girl who was running”
“Couldn’t see that key detail”
“And she let fly with a rock”
“That found its target without fail”

“As Bruce, with his strong beak”
“Commenced to pulling on a string”
“The stone sailed in and struck him”
“Very sharply on the wing”

“Bruce reeled from the impact”
“Staggered backward by the blow”
“As two more rocks came flying”
“One flew high, the other low”

“The girl reached the otter”
“While the vulture weakly flapped”
“Then she saw the nylon net”
“That had the little creature trapped”

“She bent and quickly freed him”
“Then she grabbed a sturdy stick”
“And turning to the vulture”
“Was about to strike a lick”

“The other girl ran over”
“And her breathless words insure”
“That her friend knows what she saw”
“While looking through binoculars”

“So you see the bird was helping”
“Trying to get the otter loose”
“From that awful net that choked him”
“Like a nasty hangman’s noose”

“Her friend held fast the stick”
“With which she threatened Bruce’s skull”
“I don’t trust that scheming vulture”
“Or the trick he tried to pull”

“I think that I should bash him”
“Like I would a thief or crook”
“He’s so ugly and malignant”
“And I just don’t like his looks”

“Oh Daddy, she won’t hit him”
“Why she can’t, she wouldn’t dare”
“That would be so wrong, so awful”
“Blatantly unfair”

“Just because he isn’t pretty”
“Like the other birds that fly”
“That’s no reason to think bad of him”
“That makes me want to cry”

“Sometimes my little darling”
“Fairness can seem far away”
“And people make mistakes”
“When they react with haste that way”

“There’s right and wrong within us”
“But we give our misdeeds clearance”
“When we settle for assumptions”
“And judge someone by appearance”

“Let’s continue with the story”
“See what happens in the end”
“I’ve a feeling we’ll discover”
“The special power of a friend”

“The girl was poised to strike”
“And treat that bird like a piñata”
“Okay you unsightly Vulture”
“Time to whack you like I oughta”

“The other girl stood nervously”
“Trying to gather some resolve”
“And muster up the fortitude”
“To speak and get involved”

“As this poignant seaside drama”
“Seems now poised to run its course”
“Came an act of love and mercy”
“From a most unlikely source”

“For the otter did a thing”
“Completely foreign to his culture”
“When he put his little body”
“Between her weapon and the vulture”

“The girl, she paused in mid attack”
“Surprised by what she saw”
“As Tom reached out to touch”
“The damaged wing now with his paw”

“He turned his whiskered face”
“And met the eyes of his aggressor”
“It’s now a tale as old as time”
“The strong confronted by the lesser”

“As the otter stood his ground”
“Between the vulture and the stick”
“The girl let down her arm”
“Her heart now heavy as a brick”

“For this single act of courage”
“Served to startle her and stun her”
“The compassion and the selflessness”
“Had thoroughly undone her”

“She blinked her eyes and shook her head”
“Her conscience starts to chew her”
“She was suddenly ashamed”
“Of the emotions running through her”

“The little otter’s valor”
“Was magnificent and grand”
“As her fingers wiped her eyes”
“The useless stick fell to the sand”

“For Tom had bravely proven”
“Words that Jesus did portend”
“That you have no greater love”
“Then when you give life up for a friend”

“In the days and weeks that followed”
“Bruce’s damaged wing was healed”
“For the girls had made a shelter”
“Where they kept the bird concealed”

“Each day they’d bring him food”
“Made sure he always had fresh water”
“Fish and crabs, and shrimp and squid”
“Were brought by Tom the otter”

“Till one morning Bruce was ready”
“And when mist and fog had cleared”
“He launched into the sunny sky”
“While the girls and otter cheered”

“So as Bruce soared high above them”
“And Tom went for a swim”
“The girls pledged that they’d never”
“Judge someone by looks again”

“Oh Daddy, that’s a good one”
“I’m so glad it turned out fine”
“And that everybody got along”
“Just as Jesus had designed”

“But I don’t see how the girls”
“Could think Bruce was just a brute”
“Because I don’t find him ugly”
“In fact, I think he’s kind of cute”

This made her Father laugh
“You’ve learned another lesson daughter”
As they got up from the log
And walked together toward the water

“You’ll find it’s quite a virtue”
As he set her on his shoulder
“To realize that beauty’s”
“In the eye of the beholder”

Devotional Thoughts

Oh, the strife in our world caused by judging others based on appearance. Especially when the thing we all have in common is our being fashioned and created by a loving Father in his own image. When we have this wonderful commonality, why do we choose to focus on our differences, and make unfortunate and hurtful assumptions based on those differences?

In Philippians 2: 3-4, the Apostle Paul admonishes us to *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”* This is one of those pieces of scripture I read and think, if only we could truly live this way, what a different world it would be. There’s no defining here as to who “others” are.

Jesus was once asked by a Pharisee “Who is my neighbor?” His answer was to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan. Samaritans were despised by the Jews, and yet Jesus made a Samaritan man the hero of his story. Why? To demonstrate that our prejudices and judgments have no place in the Kingdom of God. Martin Luther King dreamed of a day when his children would not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. I don’t think the Apostle Paul could have said it any better.