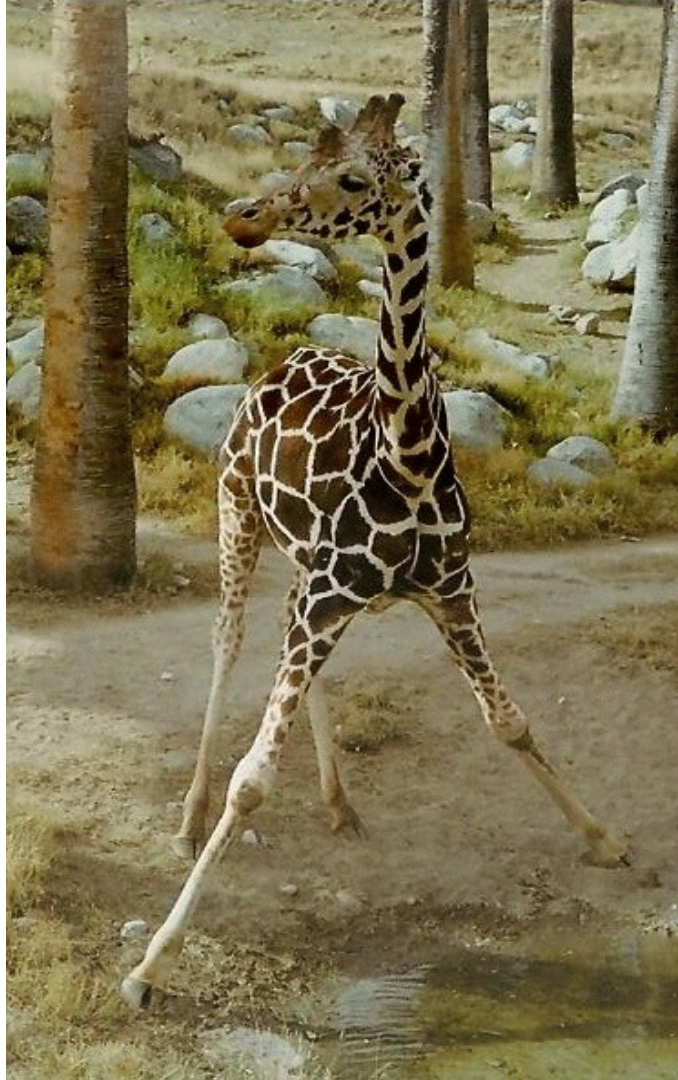


CHAPTER ONE VALLEY OF ELEPHANTS



There was to be a Council. The natural world knew.

The folds, shadows and textures of the mountains were like flanks of giant elephants, a ring of elephants, circling a valley, watching and protecting its animals, plants and flowers. Living rocks, snowberries, forget-me-nots, cornflowers, spiderworts, violets, tiger-lilies, blue bells, lady slippers and gentians created a color palate to rival any other. A roadrunner, wasp, toad, beetle, jackal, rabbit, parrot, squirrel (a mushroom on his back), mosquito, raccoon, weasel, wolf, yellow labrador, golden retriever, praying mantis, orchid mantis and tongue eating sea louse sit motionless around a large clearing, a giant gnarled Prometheus stump at the center.

As the roadrunner walks toward the tree stump, a whistling flock of mourning doves swoops down, each taking a place to close the clearing. As doves twitter “We’re Here,” the roadrunner steps back. A golden eagle, hoatzin, cuckoo and hyena sit on a branch of a Methuselah tree as a buffalo, antlion and whiptail lizard sit quietly under the tree. In the distance, an orangutan, chimpanzee, gorilla and bonobo stand next to a cougar, jaguar, lion, panther and cheetah.

A light wind begins to blow as a dark yellow Labrador walks toward the clearing, the doves opening an entrance. He jumps onto the Prometheus stump.

YELLOW LABRADOR

“I am MARCUS.

Though many of us communicate in different ways, here we’ll use a common language. Our planet is over four and a half billion years old. The seven billion humans alive today are unaware the consequences of their actions are close to being irreversible. Unhappy and violent societies have become a threat to themselves and to all life. We’re meeting to decide if we will attempt to help their species understand they can change their thinking and attitudes. Many in the animal kingdom don’t get along with humans. Going against one’s own nature is a daunting challenge. If we proceed, there may be unexpected hardships. Each of us will make a statement; if only one disagrees, we will do nothing.”

The roadrunner shouts “I am KAYAH. Whatever happens, some will hear us ”

Something moving in the distance catches Marcus’ eye, two blue flowers, a cornflower and spiderwort are floating toward him. The wind suddenly quiets, the leaves of the trees are still. Marcus continues to speak as the flowers land on his head. “Two hundred million years ago, the first flower came along and made an agreement. If you take me where I want to go, I’ll be a meal for you. Without the first flower, we wouldn’t be here. ”

CORNFLOWER

“I am BARNES.

Those no longer with us are within us. We ask those who’ve come before to help us.” Clouds move across the sky in shapes of extinct species, an Irish deer, a Woolly Mammoth, Tasmanian wolf, Toolache Wallaby, Quagga, Dodo, Magalodon, Auk, St. Helena Olive, Cooksonia.

SPIDERWORT

“I am CIRCUMSTANCE.

Our interpretation of the world is very different than that of the human species. Each of us, every species, has a purpose. A flower has a different perspective than a bird, a snake than a fish. Our perceptions color every decision we make.” Marcus bends his head forward. The spiderwort floats away.

A bird flies into the clearing.

HOATZIN

“I am GORDON.

First flowers, then sponges and dinosaurs. A hundred and fifty million years ago, my ancestor, Archaeopteryx, was the first bird, an avian dinosaur. It will take many years for humans to change.”

As GORDON flies away, a golden eagle lands in the clearing.

BATELEUR EAGLE

“I am BIKO.

Is peace dangerous for humans? They have killed over a hundred million of their own in just the last hundred years.” As he flies away, a mosquito flies into the clearing, landing on Marcus’ head.

MOSQUITO

“I am NOBODY.

If humans think they’re the planet’s most successful species, they’re wrong. After bacteria, the parasite is the most prolific and successful life form. A parasite can take over bodies and minds, making its host do what it wants in many different ways. I don’t think we can help.” He flies away.

PARASITE

“NOBODY’S right... about me. I’m a Tongue-Eating Sea Louse, TESL for short. About helping, I disagree with NOBODY. It’s important we try.”

ICHNEUMON WASP

“I am RASKOLNIKOV.

Any human’s perspective of the world is one point of view, from only one dimension.”

A Raccoon walks into the clearing carrying a mushroom on his back.

MUSHROOM

“I am TURNER.

Early human cultures understood the importance of the natural world. Today, their young don’t seem to be interested. Without plants, animals won’t survive.”

BLACK BACKED JACKAL

“I am SINGER.

We know we have everything we need. Humans aren’t aware what they have is enough; acquiring more is important for them.”

RACCOON

“I am STEINEM.

No matter what we do, it’s possible they don’t want to wake up.”

A parrot and rabbit walk into the clearing together.

WHITE BELLIED CAIQUE PARROT

“I am EARHART ”

In a mocking tone - “*The status quo defends itself at all costs!*”

RABBIT

“I am MARC.

Because of the location of our eyes, EARHART and I can see in all directions without turning our heads, even behind ourselves. We judge passage of time by listening to changes in the temperature and wind, we use our touch, smell and hearing.”

WEASEL

“I am CARSON.

The Earth’s vital signs are not good. Any achievement involves risk.”

TOAD

“I am BACH.

Humans have no idea how many plant, animal and insect species there are.”

ANTLION

“I am SIMULTANEOUS.

They’re just beginning to learn about time, space and dimension. Do they believe reality has different dimensions, that there is a reality that’s not physical?”

CUCKOO

“I am DIDEROT.

Too much information!”

GORILLA

“I am PENFIELD.

They study how the weather affects their emotions. Do they know if their emotions affect the weather?”

BEETLE

“I am GOLIATH.

We’ve been around for over two hundred and fifty million years, one quarter of all known species. We’ll overlook how we’ve been treated and do what we can to help.”

LIVING ROCK

“I am ALDA.

Not all humans behave the same. Many devote their lives to protect the natural world.”

CHIMPANZEE

“I am TESLA.

Many things changed when animals were domesticated.”

FORGET ME NOT

“I am 143.

Do they know we respond...each time one of them notices an animal, tree or flower?”

SQUIRREL

“I am ROCHEFAUCAULD.

Humans continually change their bodies and how they look. They’re so used to disguising themselves to others, in the end, they become disguised to themselves.”

ORANGUTAN

“I am AYRES.

I’ve heard humans steal each other’s identities. Why?”

WOLF

“I am MACHIAVELLI.

To get something of value, when they don’t value themselves. How humans treat others is often a clue to what they think of themselves. I am shy. Like a human I can intimidate, manipulate, deceive, steal, barter favors and overthrow an oppressor. I fight over territory, know anger and can kill for status and power. I have allies and enemies.”

PRAYING MANTIS

“I am GERVAISE.

Why should we interfere? It’s none of our business.”

ORCHID MANTIS

“I am ROSA.

I disagree. Let’s help them.”

WHITE BUFFALO

“I am TA BI SHEE.

Humans killed more than seventy million of my ancestors. I don’t know if their species has the courage to change.”

WHIPTAIL LIZARD

“I am MAATHAI.

Courage is different than strength. Their species needs to be revitalized.- accountability and kindness.

BONOBO

“I am NIGHTINGALE.

Many of us are getting sick with their diseases.”

GOLDEN RETRIEVER

“I am WALESA.

They sent a dog into outer space. Those who did this now believe they made a mistake. They’ve said “The dog was launched in a capsule that was not designed to be able to land. We did not learn enough to justify the death of a dog.”

HYENA

“I am CURIE.

(Laughing) They want to go to another planet? They don’t know how to live on this one. Do they know about the oceans?”

COUGAR

“I am GUSTAV.

They seem to be an unhappy and violent species.

JAGUAR

“I am GILMAN.

Did they learn from those who came before?”

LION

“I am LANGSTON.

Many of us know violence.”

PANTHER

“I am MILSTEIN.

We feel pain and suffer.”

CHEETAH

“I am NOTTHESAME.

Sorrow can’t be measured.”

LABRADOR

MARCUS

“It’s time for us to decide.”

