

Chapter 3

HORNS AND HALOS

The Carrion beetle waddled, rolled and flipped herself over and down the long rocks of Moonclimb Mountain. As she made her way down she sang a song, which beetles of her kind never sang unless they were about to have dinner. Today was different. Today was the beginning of something extraordinary. It was time for her kind to ready themselves. The millions of voices from the billions of bones from which her ancestors had risen called out to her now, 'Gather your brothers and sisters! It is time to harvest and grow!' Soon, she knew, her voice would not be alone. It would be one in a choir of millions!

A mountain goat perched high above the beetle on the tiniest of ledges puzzled over the lone beetles singing. There were no vultures spiraling in the morning sky. He could smell nothing of death from anywhere in the valley below. He looked again shrining his eyes to the horizon. 'No,' he thought, 'no reason for that beetle to be singing.' Now that was puzzling to a mountain goat. They dared death on a daily basis and were very familiar with its scent.

“Hey there,” the mountain goat yelled down to the beetle, his voice echoing off the mountain walls, “what’s all the singing about?”

The beetle did not stop to look back at the mountain goat and only interrupted her song to shout, “It’s about being happy.”

The mountain goat was more puzzled than ever. Why would a beetle be singing a happy song when there was absolutely nothing anywhere for it to be singing about? The goat thought for a moment. He could go down the mountain and ask the beetle. He could. He might even get a satisfactory answer from the bug. Then again, he might not. He was almost ready to leap to a low precipice when he had another thought. The beetle is probably crazy. Yes, that had to be it. The beetle had been up in the mountains for too long. Everyone knows that being too high for too long can drive lots of creatures crazy. Even a mountain goat came down on occasion for news and other dietary needs. ‘Well,’ the goat thought, ‘a crazy carrion beetle. Never thought I’d see the day.’ And that settled the mountain goat’s uneasy thoughts about the beetle and her song. Absolutely nothing more to it than a beetle that had lost its mind. And that is all the mountain goat had to do with that beetle.

A shame though; had the mountain goat been slightly more inquisitive and had taken the time to ask the beetle what it was celebrating with its song the Great Goblin War may have been avoided entirely. Well, probably not entirely but surely not quite as destructive.

The mountain goat carried on his way up the mountain and the beetle continued to sing her beetle song as she crossed into a vast open plain. Half the day into her walk across the plain the beetle heard a voice above her head.

“What are you on about little miss beetle?” Two large brown eyes peered down. The beetle looked up into the eyes that, fortunately for her, belonged to a Jack rabbit that had no taste for beetles like her.

“I’m in a celebratory mood my fine flat footed friend,” the beetle responded.

“Oh?” The rabbit smiled, with a sudden instinctual feeling that something was very wrong here, he stood on he back legs and looked over the valley. “What exactly,” he continued, his nose twitching sniffing the air rapidly, “brings you to my meadow in such a grand mood?”

“Oh my,” the beetle said surprised, “you haven’t heard?” The beetle could hardly believe no one else had heard the news. Surely this news could not be so slow to travel!

The beetle wiggled her abdomen and took in the air. She swept her foreleg out and across her eyes as if she were reading words in the air and said to the rabbit, “The Goblins have declared a new King!” She squealed with delight.

Jack rabbits eyes went wide and his legs felt weak. He squatted as close to the beetle as he could. “Can you say that again, dear beetle friend?”

The beetle shrugged and with her best, loudest annunciation she said, "The. Goblins. Have. Declared. A. New. King."

"Oh dear, oh dear," the rabbit worried aloud. "Tell me dear friend, when did this happen *exactly*?"

"*Exactly*? Hmmm, I am not too sure *exactly* when," the beetle said thoughtfully scratching his head. "I've been so caught up in my little revelry that I have hardly been paying attention to the time at all!"

"This is very important, Beetle! How many red moons into the ceremonies were the goblins before they declared a king? How long since you left Moonclimb Mountain?" Jack rabbit thumped his back foot excitedly, impatient for an answer.

"Well, when you ask the question that way it clears things up in my head quite nicely! You should ask all your questions that way and" – the beetle looked up into the furrowing brow of the impatient rabbit – "oh, I see, yes eh-hem. I left the mountain on the second night of the red moon, or was it the third night? Im' sure it was one of the two because the air was so calm on the mountain before the first red moon. I remember getting the feeling it was getting past my time to go." The beetle turned as she was saying, "Do you know the feeling? You know the one?" But when she turned her eyes up to look for the rabbit he was already gone. "Come to think of it," she said to the space where the rabbit had been, "I am sure now that it was the first night."

The rabbit ran as fast as he could, faster even, than he had ran in his entire life! The meadow quickly gave way to the sandy

hills of the Dragon Lakes where the rabbit skirted the edge of the shoreline. There was no time! He had to tell everyone! It was a matter of huge consequence!

“What’s the hurry rabbit?” A sparrow asked as he darted over the rabbit’s head. Annoyed by the sparrow’s low flying interruption the rabbit hurried on without a word. The sparrow flew up quite taken a-back by the rabbit’s cold shoulder.

The rabbit pressed harder into his run and as he did he thought, “When the Fairy realized the great peril I have put myself in with the news I carry, the miles and miles I have run to bring them the news they will reward me! Surely they will!”

Above him the sparrow was desperately trying to get his attention. He flew as if he were having a fit! An absolute fit! The rabbit smiled to himself. The bird would not be stealing his thunder today! The reward for such important news would be great indeed! Perhaps a parade would be involved! Medals no doubt!

“Watch out rabbit!” The rabbit heard the sparrow call!

“I’ll watch out, alright!” The rabbit thought. “I’ll watch out for feathered busy bodies as I—.”

And that’s the last thing the rabbit thought as a fox trotted happily away with the easiest lunch he had ever caught.

“Oh no,” said the sparrow as he circled high above the trotting fox, “poor, poor rabbit!” I wonder what had that rabbit so frightened that he would be running so quickly away from his

meadow? The sparrow followed the rabbits trail until he had reached the rabbits meadow. Down below he heard a something singing.

His sharp eyes quickly spotted the jovial beetle happily dancing and singing her way along the rabbits well worn trail. How very odd, the sparrow thought to himself as he listened to the beetles song. He circled once more and came down directly in front of the happy beetle.

“Excuse me,” he said to the beetle.

The beetle screamed! She began to dig furiously into the dirt hoping to avoid the sparrows terrible beak!

“You mistake my intentions, Miss Beetle,” the sparrow said as he plucked her out of the dirt and flipped her onto her back.

“Please don’t eat me,” the beetle cried in terror!

“I am not going to eat you,” the sparrow cocked his head and stared thoughtfully at the beetle laying on her back. “I simply wanted to chat with you for a moment.” The beetle stopped squirming and pulled her legs into each other.

“Your’e not going to eat me?” The beetle looked deep into the sparrows eyes searching for some sort of reassurance.”

“No. I already said I was not going to eat you,” the sparrow chirped, “I simply wanted to inquire about a rabbit I saw leaving this meadow in more than hurry!”

“What?” The beetle replied, her voice still quivering.

“I wanted to ask you about the rabbit.” The sparrow said emphatically.

“Oh. I. Oh! The rabbit you say?” The beetle tried to right herself without any luck. Sparrow flipped her over right side up and she began to calm somewhat. “Oh yes I remember the rabbit. Left in an awful hurry. We didn’t really get to finish our conversation!”

“I see,” he said. “And what was it you were talking about?”

“This and that,” the beetle said as she moved nervous circles of dirt around with her forelimbs. “Mostly he wanted to know why I was singing and what I was so happy about.”

“That’s all?” The sparrow asked hardly believing the beetle’s story.

“Yes,” the beetle backed away from the shiny bird beak. “He didn’t even ask what song I was singing although, I assume now that most know my songs.”

“Excuse me Miss Beetle, but I’ve been flying over this meadow and I have neither seen nor smelled anything to give you or any other carrion beetle reason to sing,” the sparrow stated matter of fact. “So what is it you were discussing with rabbit – bless his furry soul – that could have made him run off so recklessly?”

“Oh Sparrow, I wasn’t singing because of a smell..although, I do smell something now...anyhow, I was singing of the smells and things to come. I told him I was singing a celebration song and that I had just come down from Moonclimb mountain where the Goblins had just declared a king. Then he asked me how long I had been walking and when *exactly* the Goblins had declared their king and,” the beetle looked up from the circles she had drawn in the dirt to find the sparrow was no longer standing in front of her, “and he was gone! Just like you! What is it with the animals around here?”

Sparrow was a missile against the bright blue sky. He told the fox first. Even though he was full to bursting with his practically free lunch the fox too ran as fast as he could to spread the alarm.

Sparrow flew for miles telling everyone the news. Finally, when his wings had just about given out he landed on the head of an antelope and rested between her horns.

“You are an angel, Sparrow! You may have saved all of us with the news you have flew so far and hard to carry!” The antelope would spread the news and carry sparrow between his horns until he could fly again.