

Celebrating Writers and Writing in our Communities

Volume 4

Article 22

2022

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Lyer Waites

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Recommended Citation

Waites, Lyer (2022) "The Beaver's Problem," *Celebrating Writers and Writing in our Communities*: Vol. 4, Article 22.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/rwc/vol4/iss1/22>

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The Beaver's Problem

By: Lyer Waites

Before humans came into existence, all of the animals lived together. They lived in a forest with a quaint stream running through that slowly shifts into a river that your parents would teach you to be wary of. It was wide, about ten feet, and deep enough that you wouldn't be able to stand in it. You could hear the quiet trickle of the water from almost anywhere. Choruses of bird songs rang out in the early morning, making waking up the most pleasant experience. The weather was always perfect, sun beaming through the canopy to keep the forest floor well lit. The forest was always plentiful with food and resources; it supported many different species of plants and animals.

Most of the animals got along fine, but this wasn't a perfect world. There were always a couple of them that would cause trouble or no one wanted to be around. In fact, some of the animals hated each other! The animal that was filled with the most hatred was John the beaver.

John was a simple beaver, always just building his dams. On Monday he built his dam, on Tuesday he built his dam, on Wednesday he built his dam, on Thursday he built his dam, and on Friday ... well you can probably guess. All John ever did was build his dam. Now, dear readers, you might be asking, "Why does it take him so long to build his dam? Is this the only dam he's built? How are you talking to me?" Well, to answer some of those questions, John was a little bit of a perfectionist.

It only took other beavers a day to build their dam. But John had been building this dam for six months now. One time, there was a clump of mud that had a piece of green grass sticking out of it, so John took apart his whole dam, terrified that there were other pieces of grass in the mud. John has done so many things like this, so many times that all of the animals thought there was no way he would ever get his dam finished.

Some of the other animals took notice of John's inadequate building abilities and took that as further means to mess with him. There was a pair of annoying kids that would always hang around his building site, I'm sure you know the kind, a fox called Freshetta and a raccoon called Rogo. They were glued to each other; they never went anywhere without each other. Freshetta and Rogo would often go to John's dam, watch him build, and heckle him. They would see how close they could get to the mysterious place before John would chase them off.

Freshetta appeared to be a very cunning fox; she would always have a sort of backup plan for when John would eventually snap at her. He had learned to be very careful of what he would say and do around her. She was like a piranha, feeding off of the reactions that she got.

Rogo seemed similar to Freshetta in the way that she also enjoyed watching others' downfall, but she was much more of a follower than a leader. She would usually carry out the other's bidding, ending up the one John's short temper would reach first.

One day, Freshetta had the genius idea to try to sneak up to the dam and take a stick from it. She thought that it would be really funny since John would surely have the best reaction. He would probably see them and chase them off, blubbling around like the old man he is. The scene would play like a fish out of water; the fox loved to see it.

Freshetta sent Rogo over to investigate for loose sticks that John wouldn't notice missing at first. She saw that there was one loose one that wouldn't make the whole dam crumble over if taken. It was halfway sticking out and had no mud to keep it in place. When Rogo went back to tell Freshetta what she saw, her whole face lit up. This was perfect; they would just have to wait until John was working somewhere else. I don't know about you, but I think that these kids really need to be taught that they shouldn't take anything that's not theirs. Humans will do that when they come along.

Later that night, Freshetta and Rogo went on a stakeout. They waited about 40 minutes before John had to leave to cut down more trees. This was the time to strike. The duo rushed to the dam and started wedging out the loose stick. It was a little bit of a workout, but together they got it done. When it was completely out, Rogo started carrying the stick on her back.

Before they could get very far away, John returned with a freshly cut log. He had been in a good mood and was being very productive. He dropped the log on the shore of the river and was about to move it into place when he heard a quiet scurrying noise. The beaver instantly stopped what he was doing and started looking around. Someone was trying to mess with him again. What if they came to break his dam? He would defend his dam to his last dying breath, even if that was a bit dramatic. They would have to pay.

John climbed up his dam so that he could have a better view of his surroundings. On the far end, he noticed two small animals, one fox and one raccoon, that were carrying a stick from his dam towards the forest. He didn't know why they would ever need a stick from his amazing creation. They lived in a forest for goodness sake; they could find a stick anywhere.

Overcome with anger, John started running at the kids; he would definitely be having a talk with their parents. "What are you doing?!" John bellowed. He

quickly snatched his stick back from the thieves. He did this so quickly that it made Rogo fall over. But John didn't have any time to worry about her, he had to chase them off!

"Relax, it was just a joke," Freshetta responded while helping Rogo back to her feet. "It was loose anyway."

"I don't care! Get out! Go away!" John screamed back.

At first the kids stood still, too shocked to move. They had never seen him this angry before. Just when he looked like he was going to start yelling again, the duo spun around and started running back into the forest, tails between their legs.

As they were running away, John felt a little guilty about scaring them like that, but he quickly reminded himself that they deserved it. They had tried to ruin his dam after all. He just wished that he could make everyone leave him alone, but he could take this as a learning opportunity. He would need to work faster and harder from now on, with a better guard up as well.



John steadily made his way back into the forest the next day. He had stayed up the entire night guarding his dam. There was no way that he would leave it unattended while there was still a chance that he could be blindsided again, but he had to get back to work eventually.

He was heading for his favorite place to cut down trees. It was a small patch of forest that was a ways away from the river. No one ever really went there because it was just kind of plain, but John liked plain, it suited him.

From there, he could still hear the river, but it was much quieter, just a faint tickle in the back of your brain. As soon as he located a good enough sized tree, he began to gnaw on the base of the trunk. As he was getting started, he heard an indignant squawk coming from in the tree.

"Excuse me?!" The voice chirped. It was an oddly squeaky and scratchy voice. It was the kind of voice that makes you mad for no apparent reason.

John looked up to see a rather angry robin. Its feathers were ruffled like it had just been violently woken up. Since there was usually no one here, he had forgotten to check if there were any animals in the trees.

"Oh, I'm sorry," he replied. He hadn't meant to offend anyone. "I didn't see you."

This caused the bird to get even angrier. It looked like someone had done something unimaginable to her. "What do you mean 'didn't see me'? Maybe you should have just looked harder. Do you have any idea what you could have done?" she squawked back. John didn't see what was so wrong; it was a simple mistake.

This is why he didn't like being around other animals, they always make everything so complicated.

"My babies were safely sleeping in our nests until you came along and tried to kill us! Do you really think a simple apology can fix that?" she said.

Now John was starting to get annoyed. He already had to deal with a couple of kids trying to ruin his dam and now this. He was just trying to get a log. How was he supposed to know there was a bird's nest in it? She shouldn't have come to this place anyway. It's his. This was supposed to be his special place, and now it's being invaded? He thinks not.

"Maybe you shouldn't have built your nest where no one could see it," John murmured.

Unfortunately the mother bird seemed to hear him and was not happy about it. She hopped right up to the edge of the nest, jumped off onto John's head, and started forcefully pecking at his head. It was hard, not hard enough to bleed, but hard enough to really hurt. I'm not even sure if this is a robin anymore, what if it's a woodpecker?

John tried to shake her off but couldn't do it. He started running away as fast as he could and eventually felt a weight off of his head. When he slowed down, he really started to feel the throbbing pain. It resonated in his head like a bouncy ball in a room made of glass, breaking everything it came in contact with. This wasn't fair; he wasn't doing anything.

He eventually stumbled back to his dam and went inside of the living quarters, not even bothering to check for intruders like he would normally do but instead, just going straight to sleep. It wasn't even halfway through the day, but he already felt too tired to stand. He wasn't just physically tired either, he was tired of building this damn dam and tired of being bullied. Everyone was taunting him at this point. He realized that they knew he would never finish his dam, because they were the ones making sure that he never did. If everyone would just leave him alone, if he could *make* them leave him alone, he would be so much happier. Everything would be so much better.

He was dozing off to these thoughts when he felt a thump from nearby. "Ugh. Why can't I have a break?"

John sluggishly made his way out of his living quarters so that he could see what was going on. He pulled himself up out of the water and glanced up to see a massive black bear on top of his dam. It seemed to be frozen for a second before it removed its paw from the dam, revealing a hole, and continued to walk off the dam and into the forest.

John was utterly enraged. He couldn't believe the audacity that that bear had. That wretched bear had ruined everything. Everything John had worked so relentlessly hard for was destroyed just by a bear walking on it. No, it was on

purpose, it had to be. There was no way that he had suffered this much in the building process just for it to be carelessly trampled under the feet of an animal who would never even notice. He wouldn't let that thing get away with this. He had to do something!

But what could he do? Anything that he did wouldn't even matter. Kids would still heckle and steal from him, he would still be berated for simple mistakes, and he would still be underappreciated. His dam helped everyone. Without it, everything would suffer. Animals' homes would be underwater and their food sources would be inaccessible.

If no one cared about him, why should he care about others? Maybe this would show them just how much they all needed him. So John made his way over to the basically ruined dam with his still throbbing headache. He couldn't stand this eyesore anymore, it was pointless anyway. The dam was like a rot in his brain that had been steadily growing for quite some time, eventually taking him over. He wanted to be done with it, to not have to deal with the deluxe stress package that came with it.

As he stared at the depressing sight, he knew what he had to do. Slowly and surely, John started to remove the now crushed sticks from the river until there was nothing left. As he watched the now free water rush to overtake the new terrain, he was confused. This was meant to make him feel better, to remove the rot from his brain. But for some reason it only made him feel worse. He started to worry about all of the other animals who lived there. Would all of their homes be drowned now?

John didn't want that; so many animals would be displaced because of him. Sure, he wasn't the fondest of his neighbors, but he didn't want to disrupt their entire lives. He had to warn them at least; there had to be some way to make up for his poor decisions. As the guilty beaver started to run along the banks, shouting forewarnings as he went along, he saw other animals emerge from their burrows or the trees as they joined him in his journey to right this wrong.

They all continued with this for a little bit before meeting up on one side of the river. Time seemed to speed up for all of them. John profusely apologized for everything, begging for their forgiveness. Surprisingly, none of the animals seemed too upset. They all recognized their own wrongdoings that got them to this point. Soon after that, the dam was being rebuilt, and the river banks were being drained. John was even faced by Freshetta and Rogo, all three of them apologized to one another.

Nobody knew where that bear had come from or where he had gone, but the community had decided not to dwell on it. They didn't seek confrontation nor revenge, they were just glad to have an opportunity to learn more about and start to appreciate each other.