

GHOST



GHOST

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Preface

Reading is the primary pathway to learning. It is a path upon which no nation should stumble. Children must first learn to read well before being allowed to decide that a computer game has more to offer. Books give children an insight into detailed thinking not provided by other means. No movie can convey the wonderful thinking of the great authors. The most intimate friends are magnificent books, the genetics of civilization.

Reading training is the key to a unique flow of information from the author to the reader. If the “flow” is at the proper volume, then a supporting rapport is bridged between the reader and the author. Hours and hours are spent in junior and senior high schools coaching kids to play sports, to excel; yet, sports are not the primary pathway to learning. Certainly the students’ need to excel at reading is as great as the need to excel at sports. Coaches get fired for non-trophy seasons; yet reading teachers do not because schools have yet to embrace the concept of reading coaches. After the 5th grade many school systems are throwing long Hail Mary Passes to complete their reading programs.

Dedication

This story is dedicated to my parents, Evar and Catherine Bergland who taught their children by example to be good neighbors. It is also dedicated to Coal Hollow (five miles east of Princeton, Illinois) where I grew up with lots of wild animals for pets. It is also dedicated to all of the good neighbors: Harold and Mary Nelson, Ray and Ruth Smith, Tony and Katherine Colombo, George and Mary Hitchcock, Joe and Margie Vysocky, Ivan Berganz, Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Morrison, Dave Velker and Gerald Clark.

READING RATE:

For those readers wishing to test their thinking skills, there is a test at the end of this story of twenty-five True/False test questions. There are 7,829 words in this story. If you wish to time yourself, write down the time and begin when you turn the page.

Chapter 1
NOT WANTED

“Throw a stick at that fat ugly thing, Helena.”

“Look the poor dumb thing can’t think what to do. I’ll pitch another rock at it. It moves about as fast as a turtle.”

“Hey, you kids stop that rock throwing and bad name calling right now.” yelled Grandma Anna. “Shame on you treating an animal like that. It wasn’t doing you any harm.”

Grandma Anna Hutyra visits each summer from the Slovak Republic. She lives in the tiny village of Lucka near the famous dragon-eyed castle of Spissky hrad.

The gray hilltop castle is scary on moonlight nights. Grandma even knows that on eerie Halloween nights the hungry vampires scare their victims in that spooky stone castle by rattling the blood stained dungeon chains. Witches on smoking broomsticks fly up the winding tower staircases teasing the bats, cats and great horned owls. The galloping wind growls and moans through the icy towers like a train on a stormy winter night racing ghosts. Halloween nights at the castle are hauntingly horrible. The children trying to sleep in homes nearby yank the thick blankets over their quivering ears and promise to be good if they can only live to see the next day’s sun shining.

The Slovak Republic has hundreds of miles of dark green forests with splendid lakes. It has all kinds of trees, berry bushes and wild flowers. The friendly forest rangers, who are devoted to taking care of the wandering forests, live at Bijacovce. It has classrooms, guestrooms and a formal ballroom for community dining and dancing. Bijacovce is a friendly and charming place to visit. The rule is visitors must not be treated like strangers because the tradition is to shoot strangers.

The hilly forests have no fences. Horses or snowmobiles can be ridden forever. Wild pigs, wolves, bear, fox, porcupines, coyotes, badgers, elk, deer, geese, turkeys, swans, eagles, owls roam in the thick wooded hills. They just live across the spring fed creek and a mile up the crooked dirt lane from Grandma Hutyra's house. Grandma knows childhood stories about animals, wars, castles, even knights and fair maidens.

* * *

“That thing, what is it?” gulped Helena.

“It is a leave-me-alone porcupine that has strayed from the thick forest. It climbs high up in the pine trees and chews the tender bark for food. It can wag its short tail and stick sharp quills into any animal that tries to hurt it. Don't you ever throw rocks at any frightened animal again. Only mean people behave like that. Are you mean?”

“No, no Grandma Hutyra.” stuttered Robert. Robert figured when Grandma was upset, she would have enough energy to paint the house in a day. He had learned the hard way to give Grandma plenty of room if her voice sounded like rocks rolling down a tin roof.

“No Grandma Anna, we aren’t mean.” protested little Helena. She remembered yesterday how quickly Grandma grabbed a broom and chased a stray dog from the flower garden. Helena put her hands in her pockets and acted like a lost kitten.

Hoping to change her angry mood, Robert whispered “What is a porcupine good for, Grandma?” If she would start explaining about the animal, then she would calm down. The real problem with Grandma getting upset was her starting to remember other things that Robert had done. It was only last week while he was painting the old doghouse that he painted a silly brown monkey’s face on the side of the white garage. Maybe she was thinking of that right now.

She put her little sun-baked hands on her hips, quickly frowned and flatly stared at the kids; then, she motioned for them to follow her back to the house. When they entered the flower scented yard, Grandma pointed to the paint-starved bench under the apple tree for a place to sit. She wobbled to the house and returned with a tray of cookies, glasses and a pitcher of milk that she cautiously planted on the old plank table. She kept her wrinkled hands on the tray like a stern judge holding onto the desk looking over the quiet

courtroom before making the sentence upon each of the I-caught-you-doing-it guilty.

“Robert and Helena, you must not forget that each of us can help in our own way if we have a chance. Some of us may actually need two chances. You must have patience. Some flowers blossom in the spring, and other flowers just as beautiful blossom in the summer.

What is a porcupine good for you ask? That is a good thinking question. You want to know what something is or does - then you can determine how valuable it is. But think what are butterflies good for? If you can't determine what value something has right today, then does that mean it is not good for anything tomorrow?

What if we thought something was good for the wrong reason? For example, the only purpose for soldiers should be to dazzle our eyes with flashing colorful movements in parades, not to protect our country. Soldier marching bands in spectacular uniforms should be to remind us that once we were too primitive to solve our problems in a civilized manner. If that were the only purpose for soldiers, some would ask what are they good for? It would be wonderful to have soldiers and not need them! Everyone would be so happy. Does our not knowing what someone has to offer give us the right to call names and throw stones?”

Grandma Anna had friends and relatives killed in wars. She had seen homes and factories blown up by bombs. It was hard to understand what she meant sometimes when she was

rambling like a cow in the pasture. She would ask off the map questions. Then when she tried to explain some things, she would painfully cry and have angry tears hanging on her sun-wrinkled cheeks.

Her words were better than Robert had hoped; maybe she was going to tell a story. The way she was fussing around with little things: carefully pouring a glass of morning milk, slowly giving the begging puppy a bite of cookie and gently brushing the ants off the table. She was getting organized in her mind.

There were seven fat lumpy raisin cookies on the chipped plate. Grandma might eat one, three each mmmm. Helena asked permission to have one. Now Grandma put the cookies on the plate to eat, but Helena didn't take one without permission. After asking, she just waited a tiny bit and took one because Grandma would never bother to answer. She was just training us to be polite. She would not be embarrassed by lazy manners when we were visiting relatives or friends. She was also looking at the big picture trying to do her part to reduce future crime and violence.

Robert wanted to leap on the bench and excitedly shout, "Come on everybody! Grandma Hutyra is mixing up a tasty batch of cinnamon words. She's got a blue ribbon recipe for a humdinger story." He just stared blankly at the table and pinched off a piece of cookie. It wouldn't be very smart to tell Grandma Anna her old fashion cookies were better than the smell of spring flowers. She had not dismissed the rock throwing and name calling from her mind yet. It would be

easier to make a rock float than to outwit Grandma with flattery. Helena had read Grandma's little story telling signs too. Cat like she just crouched there quietly waiting eyes fixed on the mouse hole twitching her nose whiskers.

Robert thought, "O.K., O. K. Grandma crank the engine, jam the gears and burn the tires! When will she ever start the story? Give our minds wings to loop the loop through canyons of wisdom. What mysterious treasures hiding in thought shadows can we capture?"



Chapter 2
EGGS TO GO

She waddled to the hollow tree trunk half-asleep. The coughing and the sniffing sounds froze her.

“Floppy-eared rabbit, why are you in my stump home with the big basket?”

“My ears are floppy because I’m wobbly weak and sneezy sick. I was drippy wet and ice chilled to the bone in the cold miserable rain yesterday. I hopped in here this early morning looking for a warm dry place to hide from the snoopy coyote because I am too ill to run very fast. May I peacefully rest here for a short while to gather my strength again?”

“You may be comfortable here while I’m taking a long nap. Then when I wake up, you can explain about this pretty basket with the fancy purple ribbon.”

“Thank you for your kindness, but I don’t have much time to rest. Young lady, please, tell me who you are?”

“My name is Ghost. My mother labeled me that because I am an albino porcupine. Who are you?”

“I am one of the volunteer Easter bunnies. This basket is full of decorated eggs for the baby forest animals and birds, but

I'm too sick to deliver them this morning. Each year some old coyote finds my tracks and chases me, but he has never been quite fast enough. This year he can catch me. I am too weak to hop very fast. There isn't anyone I can trust to deliver the eggs. The other animals would either eat me or the eggs or both. My rabbit friends are afraid of the coyote. Some animals, like the squirrel, are not strong enough to lift all the joy in this basket."

"Mrs. Rabbit, I have the strength to carry that beautiful basket, and I would be proud to do it. I won't munch the eggs that are for the little forest folk."

"Thank you for offering to help, but the children must have these decorated eggs this morning. You poke along very slowly. You would take too many days to deliver all of the eggs; they would spoil.

The coyote and the crow would find you carrying the Easter basket. They are very clever, and they would steal the eggs from you by a cruel trick. The puma and the bear hunt in these woods. They are rough and strong; their huge paws have long sharp curved claws that would wickly snatch the basket. In this wild forest you and that egg basket would be about as successful as a nervous balloon tied to a friendly needle."

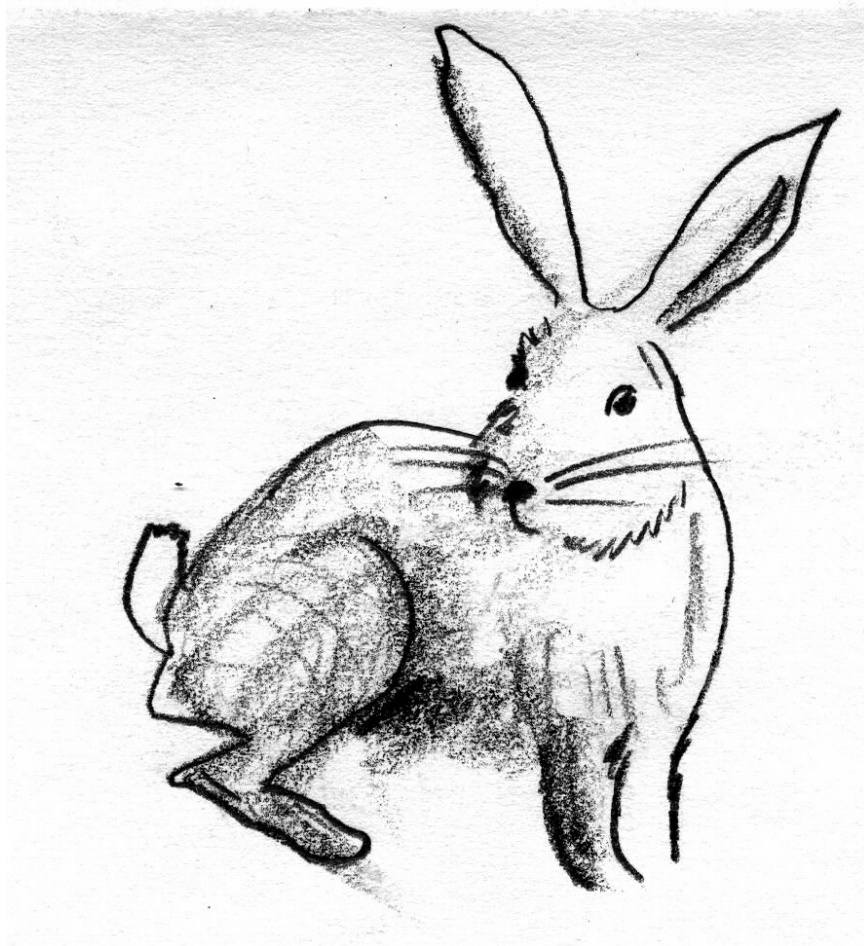
"I am not afraid of the puma, the bear or the coyote; my sharp quills will stick them if they touch me. But I can only amble along even when I rush to do something. Being slow

is terrible when everyone else is fast. I'm last before the race even starts.

Phooey, there is always some reason why I never ever get to help. If I could just have a chance to be member of a fun group one time, then I could learn about myself. I don't know who I am."

"They are too smart to touch you. Your bravery is a rare inspiring thing. Thank you for offering to help. Ah, let's think maybe, maybe, mmmm. It is only right that if you are willing to help me, then I should be willing to help you to have a chance. Your courage will make my enemies wary. The hard-working sun will soon be spying on us. We must hurry and build a snake proof a plan. If we make one mistake, the wary coyote will have the eggs; then Easter will not be celebrated by the forest children."

Chapter 3
THE PLAN



“Ghost, the coyote and the crow are very smart about the way all the animals in the forest live. To stay alive they must learn each animal’s habits. For example, the scheming

coyote will hide by an old stump near an oak tree early in the morning. He will wait for his turkey breakfast because he knows that in the fall of the year a busy young turkey will be carelessly hopping and scratching around in the leaves searching for ripe acorns and make a foolish mistake. Because of their knowledge of the animals, we must trick them into helping us. They can travel fast through the wild woods quickly spreading our Easter message.

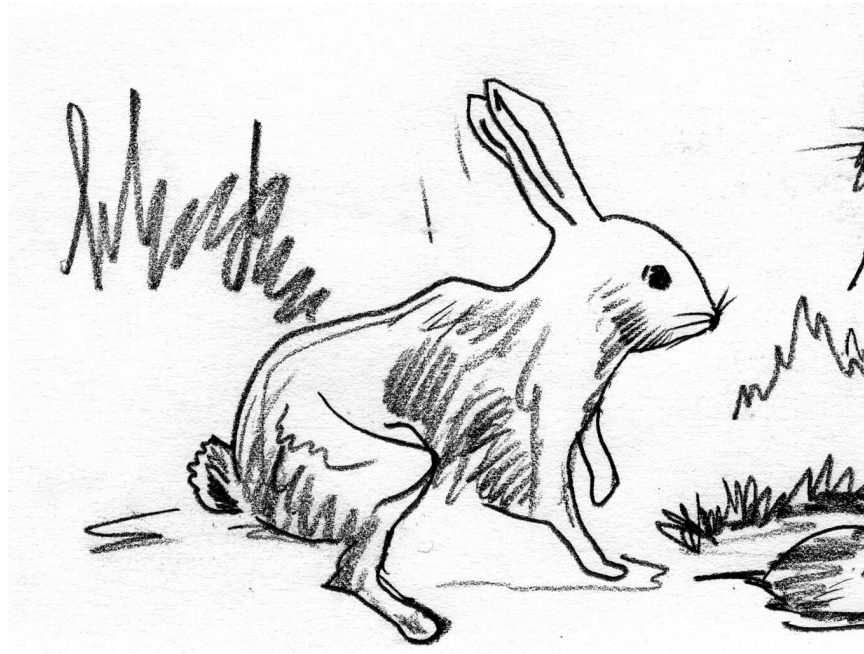
A coyote is following my tracks here looking for his breakfast. You stand guard at the doorway until the coyote gets here. Then pretend a big show of yelling names and arguing with the coyote. The curious crow will hear the noise. He will quietly fly tree to tree to investigate, hoping to find some special forest gossip or to steal a meal from an unguarded nest.”

“Arguing and yelling I never needed to learn how to do. Who would be dumb enough to argue with these quills? Now, don’t get mad at me if I make a mistake doing it. But I am not smart enough to trick them into helping us.”

“Well, at least you are smart enough to know that much. Being humble and curious are the first steps to learning about others. Speak to them like it is a treasured secret that I am too sick to deliver the eggs. Take an egg from the basket and lay it on the ground by the doorway. You can pretend like it was rolled from the basket by accident. That egg will be proof that there is really a basket of eggs. You must firmly demand of them to do a ‘fair exchange’. A fair exchange is done like this. You inform the coyote and the

crow that they can have some eggs if they tell the forest animals and birds to come here for their Easter eggs.”

“Will they do that?”



“No, they will not. The coyote and crow will travel a little way into the woods and strut like politicians. They will try to impress each other with how smart they are. They must design a plan to fool you. Then they will return and like politicians politely lie about giving the Easter message and will give you diplomatic excuses about not being able to do a fair exchange.

The crow will perch on a flat stump and act important like a self-satisfied banker behind a shining mahogany desk. He will cock his head and cough serious nonsense warnings about the future. All the while his beady black eyes are sizing you up for a few quick nips from your basket of eggs. Yes, he even steals the big words he says like a banker does from what he reads in a banker magazine.

The coyote shall wave his tail as he strolls dramatically like a lawyer saying delicious words. His mouth will water, and he will lick his lips. He will nail his hungry eyes upon you looking for some weakness to attack. His magnetic words shall have no power over you if you relax and calmly look directly into his eyes. As you look in his eye think, think that he has no honor again and again. It will stop his spell from capturing you.

He will realize your resistance; then, he will try even harder to spin a sticky web to catch you. The fact that he must make a greater effort to trap you indicates that you have strength also. When you sense he is trying harder to convince you of his lying plan, a tingling of power will grow in your mind. Immediately grab it and hold it tight even if you feel afraid. Don't let go! It is your only hope. Ride that power feeling with the meanest, toughest whip you can to win a fair exchange."

"Well ring my brass doorbell, I never would have thought of that. I guess because I have these thorny quills to protect me, there is no need for me to worry about how wickedly others

think. Why is demanding a fair exchange now so important,” wondered Ghost?

“A fair exchange makes it possible for everyone except a thief to feel happy deep inside. There is no anger, shame or hoping that maybe someday you will to be treated better. There is no feeling that you must be hurt for others to be happy. Ghost, if you ever truly fall in love or have a very close friend, it will be because there is a fair exchange. True love always demands it without exceptions. True love requires honor, loyalty, trust and integrity. Easter eggs are the symbols of those words. The meaning of Easter is a fair exchange.”

“Mrs. Rabbit, do you always talk like this or is it just on Easter Sunday?”

“Ghost, giving kids Easter eggs is a special treat for me. Who knows, someday the kids may even understand why.”

A tiny shiver passed through her body. “It won’t be easy for that coyote to get these eggs this Easter Sunday,” Ghost quietly promised herself.

“The crow and coyote will be on their stage entertaining you. Phony actors having such grand fun! One will hardly be able to wait for the other one to stop talking to you. They will wiggle with delight. Cute naughty boys playing hooky from school.”



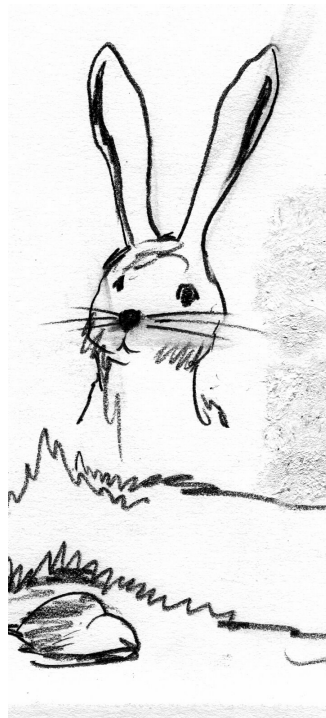
“Yes, they will do that. Then they will play a dirty trick on me. I will do something stupid. The coyote will gobble you up for breakfast; then the pair of them will steal the eggs. The little kids won’t get any Easter eggs because I am not smart. Oh, can’t I ever do anything besides climb a pine tree and chew bark?” Ghost’s quills drooped as she slowly waddled in a circle by the gnarled stump. “Mrs. Rabbit, I’m only me...”

“Don’t give up! We can’t win by quitting. Get an attitude, girl! This is your party; you can be a raspberry rainbow. Are you going to allow them steal it from you without a fistful of clawing and biting for your dignity? You must have some respect for yourself! Believe that you’re the magic princess at the ball. You can happily dance and joyfully sing in glory or cowardly hide and painfully cry in shame. It is your choice to make, not theirs.

First, promise me that you shall be a grand soldier, Joan of Arc and stand guard at the door all the time no matter what the coyote and crow say or do. Second, only give the eggs to the parents of the kids. Third remember the magic words, and they can't trick you into making a mistake."

"Magic words! Easter bunnies have magic words. Magic is how you give everyone eggs. This will be easy to beat the coyote and the crow."

"Wrong. It will not. The magic words that the coyote and crow use are 'trust me' or 'don't you trust me'? Ghost, remember to put your trust in the deeds that are done, not in the words that are said about doing deeds. Stare right into their eyes, and say 'I don't even trust myself or my Mother.' Then the crooks will be caught off guard at your answer and shall have no power over you.



Crooks are like politicians. They can only trick us if we trust them. That is why they promise anything that will get us to trust them for a little while. The secret is they only need our trust long enough for us to make the mistake of agreeing

with them. We get tricked because we are always hoping and needing to trust someone. Having someone to trust is better than eating a plateful of favorite fresh cookies.”

“I don’t know who I would trust. Hey, I trust the pretty songbirds. I would like to have someone trust me. It might not work. I would probably make a mistake. Then how would I fix a trust mistake? What if someone went around saying don’t trust Ghost? Trust is special. I had better think about it.”

“Whenever the scheming coyote or crow speaks words of trust, you need be very careful. Those words are the clue that warns you that they are lying, or it is a trick. When they want to cheat you, they will always bubble as a fountain about trust or honesty. You must ask them to explain what trust is because you don’t understand it. They’ll not like that question.

The best crooks can look you right in the eye and shake your hand. It is more than a game for them. Cheating is the only way they know how to live. They laugh a crooked laugh inside while looking honest and speaking sincerely.”

“That’s right. Just yesterday when I was up in a tree, I looked down and saw Mrs. Goose with her bouncing brood by the side of a pond eating grass. I heard the coyote in the bush say to the Canadian goose you can trust me to help watch your babies. Bingo, the slick coyote vanished, and she had lost one of her darling fuzzy goslings. I’m smart enough to do the three things that you said; I can remember that.

And I'm not afraid of them. Trust me, Ha ha! That is just a little joke. Because you said what you said about..."

"Ghost, I'm sick; enough is enough. Here grab this brightly wrapped egg and put it on the ground by the door for them to see. Hop to it; the hungry coyote is sniffing and peeking along my tracks right now."

"Unhuh, I'll will just rest here in the doorway to stop him." Ghost's shining quills rattled like spears on battle shields. This was the first time she had ever been part of a plan. She was important. The Easter bunny needed her. All the kids needed her. Oh, if she could only do at least a fierce bear growl! If only she could leap from a tree limb as a tough tiger, she would just flatten that coyote like a footprint.

Chapter 4
THE ARGUMENT



“Porky, move your fat rump from that old tower of a rotten stump. I think my yummy rabbit is in there waiting for me. I have been trailing that cottontail from the foggy berry patch to this huge maple stump. I want action now.”

“Your rabbit, garbage mouth! And the frighten baby lamb that I saw you chasing yesterday, was that lamb yours or the man’s with the rifle?”

“Quill Rug, that is not your business. The rabbit is mine, trust me. Now get away from the doorway to my breakfast. I’m as hungry for rabbit as a deep cave is for sunlight,” screamed the coyote.

“This is my home. I’m sleepy, don’t howl your nonsense at me. I’ll let some steam from you with a few of my peppermint quills. Do you like peppermint?”

“Porky, your bicycle has flat tires. You don’t have any peppermint quills.”

“You want to bet? Let me put a couple on your naughty tongue. You’ll be amazed at the...”

“Hey, what are you two waking up the forest about so early in the morning?” cawed the searching crow as he quickly hopped on the fat log. “Look there is something pretty by your foot, Porky. Careful, don’t smash it, Twinkletoes.”

“It is just a shining rock.”

“Wait a minute, that is an Easter egg. You can’t fool us,” laughed the tricky crow.



“That rabbit in the stump is an Easter bunny with a basket of eggs,” yipped the coyote as he jumped on a barrel-sized rock thinking of his breakfast of scrambled eggs and roasted rabbit.

“I’m worn out from all this blah blah stuff. I need some sweet dreams. I’ve been climbing up and down trees most of

the night trying to find some tender bark to...”

“Just a minute Porky, we are hungry for our first class breakfast. You shuffle step from the door, and we’ll share the eggs with you. That is our final generous offer.”

“The rabbit and the eggs are in my safe house. Monster Mind, why should I share with you? Look, the rabbit is sick and cannot deliver the eggs to the kids. Get the picture? I would consider sharing a few choice eggs with you if you will inform all the animals and birds to come here for their Easter eggs.”

“That would be a lot of hard work for a Sunday morning. How are we going to wake up a tired possum asleep in a deep hole? What about a wild duck swimming in the middle of a lake? We would be very busy.” smirked the coyote. “Oh maybe, if we get the best eggs, we could do it.”

“Special eggs designed just for us,” squawked the crow.
“Seriously, too many sweet eggs at one time for those dumb little kids might make them sick. We could hide half of the eggs in a safe place and give them to the kids later. The little ones should learn healthy eating habits.”

“The fancy eggs you’ll get are worth the Sunday morning work. You had better jet down the trail because the anxious sun is peeking over the tree roots. No work! No eggs! I’ll take a snooze in my doorway while you’re knocking doors.”

“O.K. we’ll go find a bunch of egg-loving critters to come

here,” snarled the coyote winking at the impatient crow.

After they left, Ghost called to the rabbit, “Easter bunny, we had better leave here. The hungry coyote might dig a hole on the other side of this stump and try to get you. There is a whopper hollow log by the river that is a safer home. I can protect you better if you are in it. It is only a short hike around the river’s bend from here.”

“That is a good idea. Thanks for trying to protect me. When the coyote and crow prance and puff back here, they will be surprised to find that we have suddenly disappeared. It will take them a few minutes to chase about following our tracks to the log. Our moving to the log will confuse their thinking about the sneaky plan they made up to trick you.”

Chapter 5
THREE CROOKS

The crow rode on the coyote's skinny back as he galloped to the rocks along the river where they sat on the boulders to argue about dividing the eggs. Those eggs would taste better than watermelon in July. But first, they needed a scheme to get the porcupine away from the stump long enough to catch the rabbit and steal the lovely eggs. It would not be simple to do because the porcupine was not hungry nor was it afraid. While they were whispering, they turned to feel the penetrating green eyes of the cougar crouched on a rock above them.



“Puma help us get the Easter eggs that are being protected by the porcupine, and you can eat the porky for breakfast,” bargained the coyote.

“I have already eaten a surprised coyote for breakfast that was trying to catch my rabbit. But weave your sneaky plan to me. Oh, I should have some eggs also. Porcupine and eggs could be tasty for my early dinner.”

“We’ll go back and tell Porky that we gave the message to the animals about the eggs, but they were too busy and didn’t want any,” chuckled the crow.

“The quill girl will get confused and blah blah about it with us. While we are arguing with the porky, you take your paw, reach under her belly where she has no sticky quills and flip her; then you can eat her for dinner without getting stuck by the quills.”

“Coyote, I don’t need you to explain to me how to catch a porcupine. Inform me who is going to feel the pain if I miss and get stuck with the needle sharp quills. Your sticky plan is just pain pawful. Why don’t we tell Miss Porky to waddle her waist to the spruce grove for an ugly porcupine contest? Let’s convince her that she is a blue ribbon winner.”

“Porky can’t be that dumb,” laughed the coyote, “To hope for a blue ribbon in an ugly contest! We could never trick her with that idea.”

“You’re the fool, coyote,” snarled the puma, “Look, Porky

has never won anything. Who even says hello to her? I have seen anthills with a better shape. A ribbon for ugly is better than no ribbon at all. Ask the warthog or the toad.”

“Warthogs certainly love their ugly babies.”

“If there was a blue ribbon contest for the best thief in the forest, coyote, would you feel cheated if the crow won?” growled the cougar.

The thick hair on the coyote’s back popped up. The hair on his tail fanned wide, “I am the only master thief in the forest; whatever some crow knows is learned by studying me from a safe tree branch. I am so clever that I can even fool myself. My lies are so fresh and brightly polished that dewdrops envy them. I have devoted my life to perfecting my thinking and acting. How could you possibly consider giving my blue ribbon to some crow for being a better thief? The forest animals would laugh at me if I did not get top honors.”

“You both sound about as smart as the porky,” clucked the crow. “Let’s stroll back to the giant stump and see what we can trick her into doing. Maybe she would leave the old stump for some special reason.”

“Coyote could you dig another hole under that big stump?” wondered the puma. The puma kept trying to get the others to accept an idea that he had because it would make him feel in charge. He was the biggest, and he wanted to be the boss.

“Well, I could do it, but it would be too much digging and

too much work. Porky looks like a big gray rock resting at a cave's entrance guarding it. It seems strange. Why would she waste her time protecting something that she doesn't even like to eat?"

"Because she is as dumb as that gnarled old stump, she has the lumpy personality to match it. We had better scoot, or she will nod off and not wake up for us." warned the crow flapping along the twisting path

Chapter 6
STEALING EGGS

“Look, Porky is gone. Quick, let’s get the rabbit and eggs,” squawked the crow.

Coyote dashed in the hole, and leaped right back, “The rabbit and eggs are gone. Here are some fresh tracks to follow. That sick rabbit can’t get very far, hurry.”

“I will fly ahead.”

“Hey, wait for us, Birdbrain. You are flying too fast for us to keep sight of you.”

“See the old hollow log; it looks big enough to be a bear cave. There’s our darling quill rug asleep right in the entrance to it. The sick rabbit must be inside with the delicious eggs.”

“Hey, porcupine, are you awake in there?” growled the dagger-eyed cat.

“Peck on the log a few times, crow, like a woodpecker does.”

“I do imitations of songs birds, not woodpeckers, coyote. I will lead a cheer to wake up sleeping beauty.”

“Eggs, eggs we want Easter eggs!” shouted the laughing three rascals.

“It must be a bad dream. Am I awake? Let me turn around in here. Who is it waking me up?”

“Miss Porcupine, we are worn to a whimper from racing all over the forest delivering the message to come here to get eggs. Didn’t anyone come?” inquired the coyote with a blank expression.

“I have been sound asleep since you left. I thought that at least a few of the good parents would have come here for eggs. The Easter bunny will be very disappointed.”

“Gosh, what a shame,” smirked the crow. “I guess they were just too busy doing more important things. It is difficult to change plans at the last moment for unexpected things like Easter Sunday.”

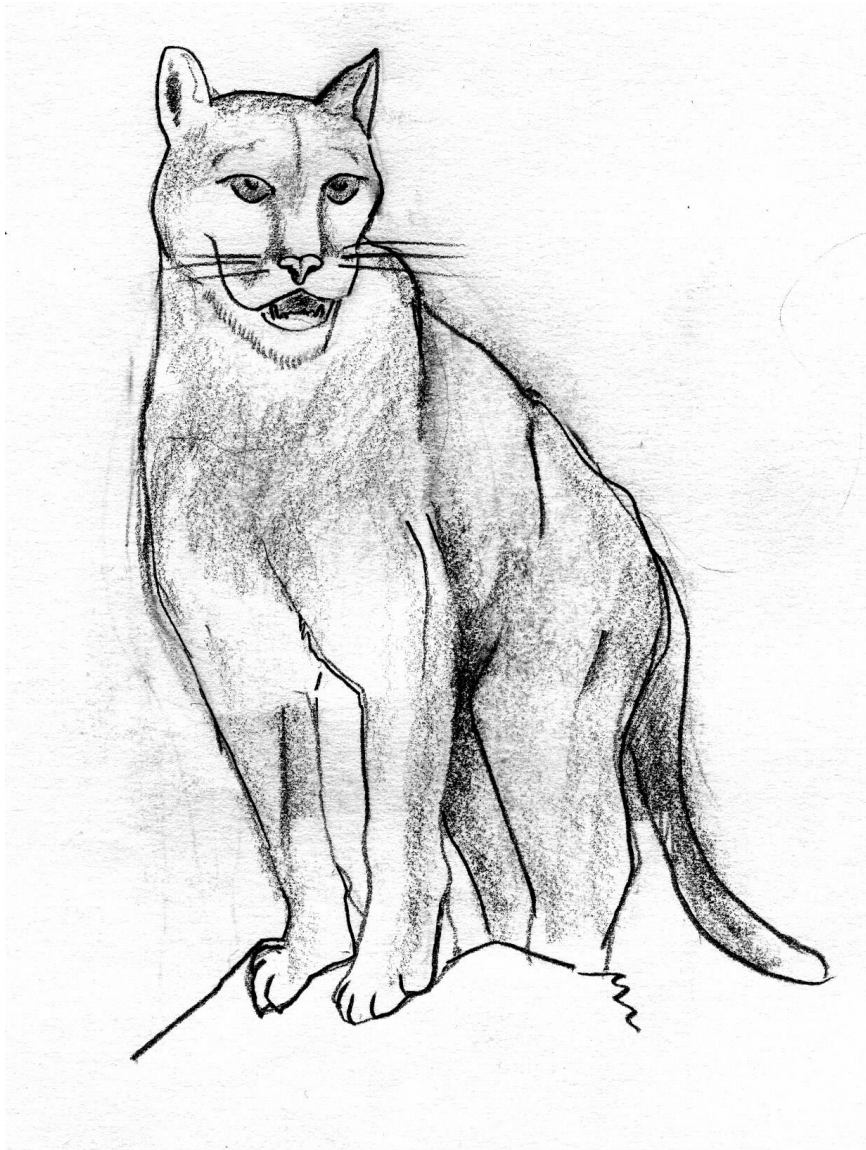
“Well, or maybe you did not give them accurate directions, and they got lost trying find to this place,” sighed a confused Ghost.

“Oh, trust us, we did a perfectly fine job,” smiled the coyote. “This is probably just a bad egg day. Maybe a bright tomorrow will be better.”

“Yes, indeed,” purred the powerful cat, innocently stretching out his paw looking for a chance to flip over the porcupine.

“But wouldn’t tomorrow be too late? The eggs might spoil. It would be a shame for them to be wasted. It would be best if we started delivering them now.”

Ghost wasn’t very good at arguing; she could seldom think



of anything very smart to say. Then it would probably be the next day. She was tired and afraid of being tricked. She had to do something before the three of them had her doing something stupid. After taking a deep breath all the way from her toes, her black-tipped quills buzzed like a coiled rattlesnake. She reared up fist on hip and stared challengingly at the graceful puma. “Puma, get your friends and round up all the animals to come her for their Easter eggs, or I will snooze and snore in this log all day. Then, hungry coyote, we’ll see who has a bad egg day.”

The wide-eyed puma fearfully gazed at the how the hair was curled and twirled this way and that on the chest of porcupine. The crow and the coyote stared at it too.

“The hair on your chest curls into the shape of an angel,” hissed the wary cat sidestepping back. His long brown tail with a black tip whipped side to side, “How did you get that angel badge?”

“My Mom told me it was there when I was born. She was going to name me angel, but she thought all the animals would make fun of me. Porcupines don’t look like angels. We don’t have any wings. That is a little joke. She named me Ghost because that is what I look like in a treetop. I haunt the trees.”

“That’s a cute story, but I have never heard of an average-type porcupine protecting a basket of eggs. Come to think of it, in all my years I have never heard of a sick Easter bunny. There must be a sneaky trick going on here, and I don’t want

any part of it. I wonder about this confusion of a porcupine, a ghost, and an angel. This is very spooky.” The puma nervously yawned, ears twitching, “Cheating coyote, what have you not told me? Heck, it doesn’t matter. I have been hunting all night; it is time for me to sleep. I don’t want any nightmares about flying porcupines.”

“Don’t leave now! Porky is just bluffing. What about your share of the eggs?” whined the coyote.

The frightened puma had leaped so fast that only its shadow was there to hear the words of the coyote. He didn’t visit that part of his forest again until late summertime.

Ghost smiled, “Trust me, coyote and crow, you shall get no eggs until the animals come for their eggs. Now if you frogies don’t believe that, then jump on my back and croak.” Ghost felt woop tee doo saying that without any help from the rabbit. She wondered, “Am I having that scary power feeling the Easter bunny mentioned?”

“We are sorry that the cagey cougar was a rude dude to you. Please don’t be angry with us,” pleaded the baby-eyed coyote curling his bushy tail between his legs. “We are your next door neighbors. That monkey-tailed puma is practically a stranger to us. He always acts like he is better than we are. You know how arrogant cats are and so indifferent to the feelings of others.”

“It was the cougar’s idea to taste test all of the Easter eggs. We told that claw-footed creeper all we wanted to do was

just help our dear friends. We would do our little part in the great Easter celebration by handing the eggs to the animals as they paraded here for them,” cackled the crow, bouncing back and forth on the log.

“That is exactly right,” grinned the sly coyote. “Trust us! We are just your helpers. Hand us the marvelous basket, and we’ll deliver the eggs before the kids wake up.”

“I don’t even trust myself. Now stop all the yaking and deliver the correct message to everyone this time.” And with that the porcupine confidently closed her eyes as she lay in the doorway of the hollow log.

Chapter 7
EASTER PARADE

The coyote and the crow scrambled to the forest howling and cawing the news of Easter eggs. “Eat Easter eggs! Free Fabulous Fun! Come to the big hollow log where the pine tree leans over the river.”

The cautious Mrs. Deer peeked through the spruce branches and stamped her front feet. There was a porcupine by a big hollow log, no eggs. Mrs. Turkey trotted past the deer toward the log gobbling about free eggs for her bunch of chirping chicks. The ducks and geese waddled from the river quacking and honking. The squirrel jerked up and down the pine tree that leans over the river like a student driver learning a stick shift.

“Wake up, Ghost, you did it. You saved the eggs for the kids,” whispered the smiling Mrs. Rabbit. “I can hear lots of marching feet. Go hand out the eggs to them. I must scoot out and discover a new home before the coyote comes back hunting for me again.”

Ghost proudly lifted the basket and turned from the log entrance like a large stone rolling aside from a cave to face the world. Mrs. Rabbit waved goodbye to a new friend. For all the careful scheming and tracking that the coyote had done, the Easter bunny had escaped to a better world.

Ghost was surprised to see a crowd of happy visitors. She was worried that she might do something dumb and be laughed at by everyone. So what's new? The Easter bunny was right about her having a choice. Who would have wanted to come to a loser's party? This was the most important day of her life. She was actually making others happy. Maybe one of them would become a real friend.

The coyote and the crow jumped and pushed to the front of the line demanding their eggs first. Ghost nervously announced, "I I wa wa want to thank the crow and coyote for bringing you here. It was their hard work that helped make this Easter a happy one for you. Their attitude deserves the special eggs I prepared just for them."

She carefully tossed a delicious looking egg to the crow. The crow quickly flew up, caught the egg in his talons, winged his way to the big rocks and perched on a flat one. Quickly he pecked at the egg to open a hole. Nothing sweet bubbled from it. He peeked in the little slot. Why couldn't he see anything?

Ghost awkwardly stepped away from the entrance of the log. She held the best egg of all for the coyote to see. Then she slowly rolled the wobbling egg into the log. The coyote rushed in expecting to grab the rabbit and snatch the egg. Ghost waddled back in front of the doorway. The coyote was trapped in the log.

The coyote frantically sniffed and searched for the rabbit. The rabbit had escaped. The disappointed coyote scooped up the egg in his jaws; then, he lay down with it between his paws. He nervously licked on the chocolate covering and chewed anxiously on the egg to quickly crack it with his snapping teeth; then, he bit his long tongue. The coyote acted as if he had a hot potato in his mouth. He was angry enough to fight skunks and hungry enough to eat worms.

The crow and the coyote both found their eggs empty except for notes which read, "Trust me, I am no angel." They were as mad as fighting alley cats. They had been taught a lesson by a dumb porky after all their hard work to gather the animals. But they could not complain that a porcupine was smart enough to trick them. This was a very embarrassing Easter. They would not even tell each other! Ever since that day no creature in the forest has witnessed a crow or a coyote trying to trick a porcupine.

The coyote was frantic about being trapped in the log by Ghost. It wasn't possible for him to have been tricked twice by a porky. He howled and chewed on the log trying to make an escape hole from Ghost's jail. He could not bite or shove the porcupine because of her sharp spear quills.

Finally, he gave up and loudly threatened, "Let me out right now, or you'll be sad and sorry!"

"Why, Mister Coyote, you have been yapping at me all morning to let you in that safe old log. Now as soon as you get in there, you loudly demand to be let out again. And

another thing, where are your best Sunday manners? Did I hear you say please?”

“I’m getting mad and mean in here. Somebody is going to get hurt. I worked very hard to help you to deliver eggs. This is a terrible trick to do on Easter Sunday.”

Ghost could feel that sparkling sense of power growing within her like Mrs. Rabbit described. She must hold it close and tight and not be afraid. Now she must ride with a mean whip to get a fair exchange from the coyote to protect all the animals. Maybe she could get back what had been stolen long ago. There may never be another chance to do it.

“Hey, Mr. Nasty Trick, you tried to eat the Easter bunny on Easter Sunday! Trust me, I’m not forgetting that. Don’t try any of your cross-eyed logic on me. I’m so sleepy from the Easter excitement. Mr. Coyote, I’ll just take a nap. While I am sleeping, you can practice saying please. It is a difficult word for you to pronounce, but if you practice for a couple of hours...”

“I don’t need any sweet peaches and cream practice. Please, please let me out.”

The waiting animals and birds were thinking, “Is this really happening. The coyote can’t be the badmouthed bully. He has to be polite. Bingo! This is better sport than watching a careless hunter hopping around getting blood all over the snow after shooting his foot while crossing a barbwire fence.”

“Thank you for saying please, Mr. Coyote. And another thing, please be a kind sweetheart and promise never to chase an Easter bunny again. It is not right to endanger the happiness of Easter for the little ones.”

“Trust me, I promise never to chase another Easter bunny again, nor will I try to steal the eggs,” smirked the coyote.

“Thank you for embracing that promise, Mr. Coyote. And another thing, you must promise that you will never bleat your trick words ‘trust me’ to anyone ever again. Gosh, I’m too beat. A long peaceful nap would make me feel fine.”

“Wait, wait I promise never to utter ‘trust me’ again,” grinned the coyote.

“Mr. Coyote, don’t think tricky. If you trash your promises, your rusty colored hair shall turn white like my quills. Then all the animals will see you wherever you go in the dark forest even at night. It will be difficult for you to catch any food for your dinner.”

The coyote stopped grinning. He had always been daring, risking wild chances. He enjoyed laughing at silly rules. It was great having others point and cuss at him. But this was a no joke porky. How could a slow ugly dumb porcupine trick him twice in one day? He would have to seriously think. He didn’t ever want to be jailed in a log by this porky again. Being a white hunter in the forest at night might be like dieting in an ice cream parlor.

Ghost stepped from the log doorway, and through it a different master thief trotted. The animals waiting for their eggs seemed to have more dignity, a calm proud look. The rules had been changed. No one has ever seen a white coyote.

Chapter 8
AN ANGEL

Ghost gave the dancing squirrel an egg to carry in the curve of her tail. The beaver waddled away with one on her wide flat tail. The buck balanced an egg between his antlers. The geese and ducks looked fat carrying eggs under their wings. What a funny parade of egg balancing marchers!

As Ghost stood handing an egg to each animal and bird, they could admire the shape of an angel on her chest. Maybe, they thought, someday one of their children would proudly wear an angel badge along the forest paths.

After thanking Ghost for the gift, the animals and birds carried the pretty eggs to their children. The parents whispered to them about meeting a white porcupine with an angel badge. Most of the kids knew that all porcupines are dark brown. Even a rocket scientist would imagine that a white porcupine must be an angel. Best of all, the porcupine had sent the coyote and crow into the forest to invite everyone to receive an Easter gift. Then the kids knew it had to be an angel. Only an angel could be smart enough to get the coyote and crow to do such a friendly thing.

Since that Easter long ago when the porcupine named Ghost helped the sick Easter Bunny, the animals tell the story year after year. The story is always being changed a little each year.

Mr. Crow, waving his wings and bobbing his head like a banker, said that after everyone had left on Easter Day, Ghost had gone to sleep in her doorway. A bald eagle with huge sharp talons circling in the sky dove screaming at Ghost. She lit on the log and acted so mean and fierce that even the berry-eating bear stood up and growled. In her beak was a royal purple laced ribbon that she draped on the sleeping Ghost. On the ribbon was written in large shiny gold letters, "Ghost, my trusted friend." There was no signature on it. But even a rocket scientist knows that eagles don't express messages from wiggling tadpoles.

One year Mrs. Squirrel barking and waving her tail like a circus ringmaster told her children that Ghost flew through the forest on angel wings hiding Easter eggs for the kids to find. Another year Mrs. Duck quacked to her kids that Ghost floated down the river in a run-a-way canoe tossing eggs to everyone on the bank. But one thing never changes. The parents always remind the children of the forest to respect each other because an angel is dressed as one of them.

The Beginning!

(Record your reading time.)

This is a memory and comprehension test.

Test questions: You may discard any four questions.

Each correct answer is worth four points (4X25=100). A perfect score is one hundred.

1. (TF) At the beginning Ghost didn't know her potential.
2. (TF) Ghost saved her dignity by demanding a fair exchange.
3. (TF) Ghost was afraid of the other animals laughing at her.
4. (TF) The coyote didn't respect Ghost at the end.
5. (TF) Animals liked Ghost only for the eggs she gave them.
6. (TF) Ghost is like a kid that goes to my school.
7. (TF) Ghost acted and talked too smart to be dumb.
8. (TF) Mrs. Rabbit was like an Easter gift to Ghost.
9. (TF) Grandma thought soldiers should be in parades, not in wars.
10. (TF) Animals in the Slovak Republic are like those in the U.S. of A.
11. (TF) Robert paid attention when Grandma was speaking.
12. (TF) Helena was not polite to Grandma Anna.
13. (TF) There are no fences in the forests of the Slovak Republic.
14. (TF) Even today the crow and coyote still trick porcupines.
15. (TF) The Easter Bunny taught Ghost some game rules.
16. (TF) Ghost's new rules made the coyote a better competitor.
17. (TF) Ghost used violence to make coyote accept the rules.
18. (TF) In general rules compel us to strive for a higher standard.
19. (TF) A sick rabbit gave Ghost a chance to prove her value.
20. (TF) Kids should wait for sick rabbits to get their chance.
21. (TF) Ghost helped the other animals to feel proud.
22. (TF) The Easter Bunny told Ghost to trap the coyote in the log.
23. (TF) The animals liked Ghost because she had peppermint quills.
24. (TF) This story is really about people.
25. (TF) Ghost was too mean to the coyote.

26. (TF) This story is not about delivering Easter eggs.
27. (TF) The coyote acted like a banker.
28. (TF) Some people are afraid to feel powerful.
29. (TF) “What did you come to see a reed shaken by the wind?”

Home work activities

1. Make up five test questions for the story.
2. Write out the answers for the test questions.
3. Draw your own pictures for the story on the blank pages.
4. What part of the story would you like to change?
5. If you had an angel badge, what would you do for others?
6. How could you help someone to make friends?
7. Separate the memory and the comprehension questions.

Other writing projects:

The author has written two other children’s stories: 1) Melinda is a story about a Christmas tree. 2) Fluff is a story about a cloud.

The author has written poetry, stage and screen plays.

The author is writing a book to help parents teach reading.

Post Script

Reading habits are not easy to change. The way to change a habit is to practice a new way. Generally, it is more difficult to change reading habits than other habits like how to hold a fork while eating. Changing reading habits can improve grades and make homework less work.

Reading slowly is often the result of moving the lips or “sub-vocalizing”. Reading slowly discourages a student from doing homework. It is one of the meanest obstacles in the pursuit of advanced education. Beginners are expected to read slowly. Students in the 6th grade are not beginners. Does a race car driver train for a race by driving slowly? If a race car driver makes a mistake, he gets in an accident. If a student reading fast makes a mistake, he gets in the refrigerator for a snack. Driving fast is exciting. Reading fast is exciting, without the speeding tickets.

Sure, it is possible to read and study with the TV going full blast. It is possible for a doctor to operate on a brain with a head set on listening to hard rock. Winners do what it takes to win. A lack of preparation means not being ready for the opportunity to win. Making a half-hearted attempt causes more anguish (rips a hole in self-image) and takes as much time as doing it right. How many mediocre students are proud of their accomplishments? Embarrassment is more painful and more enduring than the sweat of hard work. A lifetime is a long time.

THE GIFT

“The deer is a gift for food and clothing.
We celebrate and thank the deer’s spirit.”
“Mom, there is the painful work I’m loathing.”
“Echo, this is an omen of merit.”

“Feel the cozy sun visiting at length.
The proud brook struts near flaunting naked mirth.
Look past the wrapping, feel a challenge’s strength.
Choose a hopeful attitude, warm the earth.”

“Echo, prizes are worthy the tough goals met.
Focus, ignore jewel-webbed mirrors.
Ideas, tingling trickles, are creeks of sweat.
Echo, be the longbow and the arrow!”

“Mother, are you to me a loving gift?
Clutching clouds do urge my desires adrift.”

Footnote:

It is worthwhile to examine the mother and daughter roles in the story and in the sonnet. In the story Mrs. Rabbit is acting as a mother to Ghost. Both mothers are trying sincerely to do right by their daughters. Echo’s Mother needs to be given the benefit of the doubt since there are only fourteen lines to examine her verbal behavior.

Mrs. Rabbit designs a basic plan for Ghost to implement. She gives her encouragement to do her best. She warns Ghost about problems and advises her how to deal with the problems.

Then Mrs. Rabbit does what mothers should do. She went to the next room rested and hoped for the best. Nearby if needed, yet she was not present to do those neurotic things that hovering mothers do.

Overprotective parents are neurotic and are attempting to produce neurotic children. Being overprotective is more than polite words for just playing it safe. Overprotective is a snake slowly coiling itself around a victim. Increasingly laws and regulations promote a society of overprotective pillow punchers. Standards are placed in the shadows rather than in the sunlight.

Ghost was allowed to make decisions, to take actions, to get results and to feel consequences. Ghost was allowed to put her unique stamp on the process without fear of being smothered by a mother's overpowering personality. She did not need to look for distractions to avoid working with her mother; she didn't feel angry/guilty with an interfering mom.

Often mothers invite daughters to do projects; then, they act as sheepdogs constantly nipping at the heels throughout a project. Another way some moms undermine confidence is to give a choice. The daughter chooses red. Sweet sickening mom then says, "Now, you know my favorite color is blue."

The daughter manages to be wrong and guilty in one decision while feebly attempting to establish her independence. Sure she knew her mother's favorite color was blue which is exactly why she did not choose it. To save herself the daughter shall eventually avoid her mother or constantly fight her mother.

Once a child is given a choice, then there must not be any interference before or after the choice is made. Any helpful factual information, if given, needs to be given prior to the offer to choose. The child is to be congratulated and supported after deciding. The child accepts an offer of choice as a vote of confidence. Mothers need to plan or arrange decision experiences for children. Children need to be allowed to live with the natural consequences of their decisions. Sweet sickening moms love to interfere with the consequences for various neurotic reasons. It is as important to the child's personality to learn to cope with the consequences as it is to learn to make the decisions.

Depending on the relationship, mothers should mention in the presence of daughters their differences to relatives and friends. This will assure the daughter that her personality is not being suffocated by the mother's personality. The emerging personality is in a desperate fight for its well being. A mother needs to respect the process (Respecting a process can certainly be done within a framework of enforced family rules.).

Part of disobedience relates to the struggle of a daughter/son trying to assure self of being independent of parent's

dominating personality. Example of disobedience: “Daughter go to the store and get bread, milk and hotdogs.” Instead of milk the daughter gets butter. Mother can’t believe it! The daughter is attempting to tell her mother that she can’t do everything the way mom says to do it. Following a parent’s directions accurately can be a threat to a child’s personality development. The daughter decided that her mother’s anger was more acceptable than the fear of her personality merging with her mother’s. Parents should review the number of daily directions given a child to reduce conflicts. The example could have been with speed limits or drugs.

The writer wanted to recapture the story in sonnet form to give students an example of how a poem can state the theme of a story. Of course, the purpose of the sonnet is to have mother help her daughter recognize the many gifts and struggles of daily life. In the last two lines the daughter gives an insightful response but insists upon preserving her uniqueness via exploring beckoning experiences.

Easter gifts seem to be more from the warm heart and less from the fat wallet. Even though Easter is not treated as a holiday as great as Christmas, it is at least equal to it as an emotional religious experience. True, it lacks the speeding tickets and backbreaking obligatory lists.

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