

King Solomon and the Otter

A Hebrew Folktale

words by Heather Forest

It is said that King Solomon was so wise he could speak and understand the languages of all the animals. To set an example for people, he decreed there should be peace among the beasts.

Peace among the beasts!
Peace among the beasts!
King Solomon decreed:
Peace among the beasts!

"Death! Death! Death to the slayer! Death to the slayer!" Otter cried. It's the fault of Weasel my children died. I came out of the water with their food (I brought them these little crabs...oh they loved little crabs...) and found that Weasel had trampled my children dead on the ground! He broke the vow of peace, agreed among the beasts. Peace is dead and death instead reigns without cease. I want justice."

When the animals heard what Weasel had done to Otter's children, their outcry was immediate.

"Bring Weasel to the king!" cried the other animals.

"Oh King," said Weasel, "what Otter says is true. But my heart contains no malice when I do the things I do. I heard Woodpecker drum a call to arms. I never meant to do Otter any harm. The drums...they thrilled me to the core and I trampled her children as I marched to war."

"Then bring Woodpecker before me," said the king.

"Oh, King," said Woodpecker, "be not alarmed! I drummed the drums but I meant no harm. I saw

Scorpion sharpening her sting. It frightened me so that I let the drums ring."

"Then bring Scorpion before me," said the king.

Into the throne room came Scorpion holding her poison sting high above her head and she said, "King, I made no offense. I sharpened my sting in my own defense. I saw Turtle climbing into her armor. I did the same, but I meant not to harm her."

"Oh, King," said Turtle, "my armor is strong. I climbed in for safety but I meant no wrong. I saw Crab with angry claws, she was charging across the ocean floors!"

Into the throne room came Crab with tears in her eyes and claws outstretched she said, "Yes, I confess. Yes I confess. It's true what she saw. With angry claws I *did* charge to war. But I saw Otter dive into my home and eat my children I'd left there alone."

"Well," said King Solomon turning once again to Otter, "Otter, you're the one who cries 'Justice be done,' when Otter, you're to blame!"

"One who sows the seeds of death shall reap the same."

Peace among the beasts!

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