

Jarvis the Duck

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The Book of Ra

Jarvis is a young duck that lives on a small pond in The Great Poplar Forest. These are the chronicles of his adventures.

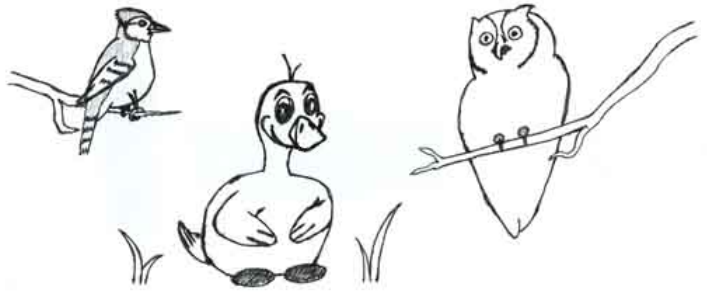
It was mid-September, and Jarvis was on his way over to the nest of an old grandmother duck named Harriet, an old friend of Jarvis's grandmother. Harriet had just moved to The Pond with her granddaughter, Angeldown, from further out in the country of The Great Poplar Forest. Harriet's husband, Walter, had passed away recently, and she had family at The Pond. Jarvis had been doing odd jobs for Harriet over the last month to earn a little extra pocket money.

When he got to the nest, Jarvis called for Harriet. "Hi, Jarvis," said Angeldown, popping her head out of the nest.

Angeldown was a very pretty young lady, as pale yellow and downy as a baby chick. She was also a very sweet girl, with a smile for everyone. Jarvis had noticed how pretty she was and the beauty that shone from the inside. Angeldown liked Jarvis; she had noticed that he wasn't arrogant and self-absorbed like the other ducks at The Pond. Angeldown was very smart, and she liked riddles. She and Jarvis had been trading riddles with each other on his visits to do odd jobs.

"Hi, Angeldown," said Jarvis with a smile. He thought it odd that his heartbeat quickened a little.

"I have a riddle for you, Jarvis," said Angeldown. She felt her heartbeat quicken



a little as well. She did not think it was quite so odd. She recited:

"This thing has a godlike power to change its shape.

At times, it can be more slippery than a snake.

At other times, it is as hard as stone.

At still other times, it can shrink until it is simply gone."

Jarvis thought for a while. He smiled and scratched his head. He was having trouble concentrating. Finally, he blurted out, "Water." "Normally, it flows right over your feet, but when it's cold, it turns to ice. And on hot days, little spots of water can dry right up."

"Very good, Jarvis," said Angeldown with a smile.

"I have a riddle for you," said Jarvis, with a malicious smile on his face. "How does a blonde learn to swim?"

Angeldown frowned, but before she could answer, Jarvis grabbed her and threw her into the water. She grabbed Jarvis as he threw her, and they both landed in the shallow water next to the nest. They were both laughing; then Angeldown said in mock seriousness, "I have another riddle for

you, Jarvis: What's big and white, and black and blue all over."

"I don't think I want to know," said Jarvis.

Harriet was making her way through the reeds towards the nest. As she approached, she called out, "Hello, Jarvis!"

"Hello, Harriet," replied Jarvis. "Just wanted to see if you had any odd jobs today."

"Nothing today, I'm afraid," said Harriet, settling down in the nest. "I was just off chatting with some of the other grandmothers. My, they do like moss and thistle down here at The Pond. Are you doing all right? How's your grandmother?"

"Grandma's fine. Angeldown and I were just trading riddles again."

"You two do like riddles," said Harriet, and after a brief pause, she said "I know one old riddle, Jarvis. Care to try your luck? I know Angeldown has already heard this one."

"Sure!"

Harriet recited:

"Enrobed in crimson and gold,

A wondrous vision to behold,

I am the beginning, and the end.

I steal dreams from most creatures of the land."

Jarvis thought for a while. He smiled and scratched his head again. He thought some more, then he smiled, "I know this one." "The dawn sun, Ra at daybreak."

"Very good again, Jarvis," smiled Angeldown.

"That is from the ancient Book of Ra," said Harriet.

"Really," replied Jarvis. "That's an interest of mine. Do you know much about it?"

"I do," said Harriet. "My grandmother was a priestess. In the old days, we had those. She taught me all about it."

"Can you tell me what you know?"

"Of course, if you can stay a while," said Harriet.

"I can. Please tell me."

"I'd like to hear it again as well, Granny," said Angeldown.

"The Book of Ra tells of the creation. In the beginning, there was only a black ocean of emptiness. Ra created himself and an island. He stood on the island of land in the emptiness. This was the world. He created the sky and the oceans. Then he created four other gods: Osiris, Isis, Seth, and Nephthys. Finally, Ra created all life on earth. Osiris was a good and strong god. He was the original ruler of the earth, under Ra. Isis was the wife of Osiris. She was kind and loved Osiris very much. Seth quickly became jealous of Osiris and chose evil over good. Nephthys was the sister of Isis. She was to be the wife of Seth, but she rejected him because he was evil."

"Turning himself into a serpent, Seth killed Osiris as he took his daily walk. Osiris entered the underworld as a spirit. Isis found Osiris's body and drew the venom out of his blood. She then commanded the

winds to breathe life back into Osiris. Thus, Osiris was resurrected and returned to life on earth. As Osiris had entered the afterlife, however, Ra decided to make Osiris king of the underworld. Ra himself now rules over the world. Seth is a master of disguise. He eludes the eye of Ra, dwells in darkness, and tries to bring the creatures of the earth over to the dark side. Isis is also a master of disguise. She walks the earth trying to protect all creatures from evil, whether it be that of their own choice or that brought about by Seth. Nephthys helps her sister, Isis, with this never-ending task.”

“Every year, as the date of Osiris’s murder approaches, Ra becomes overwhelmed with sorrow. He allows himself to fade, and the earth dies in the winter, so that the world will understand the destructive power of evil. Ra is reborn in the spring, so that all creatures will remember that rebirth from evil is always possible.”

Jarvis sat in stunned silence for a while. Finally, he said, “Thank you, Harriet, there is much that I didn’t know,” and after a brief pause, “and much that I don’t know- The wiser one gets, the more one knows how much one doesn’t know.”

“Indeed, Jarvis,” said Harriet, and after a pause, she said “You seem to know a lot for your few years.” “There is one other thing I need to tell you two.”

“Yes,” said Jarvis and Angeldown in unison.

“When I was chatting with the other grandmothers, I found out that two ducks here at The Pond have come down with a strange disease. It has sapped their energy, they have strange black marks on their bodies, and one is becoming delusional. It is said that there are others like this at The Great Lake and other places as well.”