

Stories
for
1st and 2nd
Grades

Roberto Trostli

The Hartsbrook School
193 Bay Road
Hadley, MA 01035
(413) 586-1908
rtrostli@hartsbrook.org

Stories for 1st and 2nd Grade

Roberto Trostli

The Question.....	3
Autumn.....	5
The Light of Men.....	6
How the Seeds were Scattered.....	7
How the Seeds were Scattered, Part 2.....	9
A Grain of Sand.....	11
A Drop of Water.....	13
The Trees.....	15
The Trees, Part 2.....	16
The Children of the Rain.....	17
The Stream.....	19
The Stones.....	20
The Stones, Part 2.....	22
Spring is Coming!.....	24
The Two Kingdoms.....	25

THE QUESTION

Roberto Trostli

Hard by the edge of a dark forest lived a woodcutter, his three sons, and his little daughter. Every day, the boys helped their father, while their sister stayed home and kept house. How the boys hated their work, and they found no meaning in such difficult, monotonous lives. They could hardly wait to leave the forest forever and seek their fortunes in the wide world.

When the day came for the oldest son to leave home, his father said, "Fare well, my son. May you find the meaning of life." The boy walked off, and before long he came to an inn. Standing by the door, he smelled the roasting meat and heard the clank of tankards and the jolly voices of the people inside. He entered and joined the merrymaking. When he heard that the old innkeeper needed someone to work for him, the oldest brother thought, "Ah, this is the life for me: good food and drink, and a soft, bed at night!" So he stayed and helped the innkeeper. He cooked so well and was so jolly, that before long he became the proprietor of the inn.

A year passed, and when the day came for the second son to leave home, his father said, "Fare well, my son. May you find the meaning of life." The boy walked off, and before long he came to the inn. "Come in and stay a while," his brother said. As they ate, the clatter of horse hoofs sounded outside the door. In walked a band of soldiers, dressed in their fine clothes, their swords and spurs jangling as they passed. As he listened to the soldiers recounting their fine exploits, the second brother thought, "This is the life for me: honor in battle, and to ride a fine horse!" So the second brother joined the soldiers. He was so skilled at arms and so brave, that before long the soldiers made him their the leader.

Another year passed, and when the day came for the third son to leave home, his father said, "Fare well, my son. May you find the meaning of life." The boy walked off, and soon he came to the inn. "Come in and stay a while," his brother said. As they ate their dinner, the chant of prayers drifted in the window. Looking out, the youngest brother saw a group of monks. They were dressed in faded black robes and wore no shoes, but a look of contentment shone from their faces. As he watched the monks stop and beg for food, the third brother thought, "Ah, this is the life for me: to live and to study in the service of God!" So the third brother joined the monks and went with them to their cloister. He was so devout and so studious, that before long the monks made him their abbot.

The years passed, and the woodcutter became older. Often he wondered whether his sons had found meaning in their lives. In the winter evenings he sometimes thought back on his own life; how difficult and meaningless it now seemed. As the old man grew weaker and frailer, he brooded more and more upon the question: "What is the meaning of life?" Had his sons discovered it? The question gnawed at his heart and gave him no peace.

His daughter observed her father's torment and pleaded, "Father, let me go to find my brothers. I will bring them back to answer your question." The old man refused, saying, "If you leave me, then my life will be totally empty." The days passed and still her father found no peace of mind. The girl asked again, and finally her father gave his consent.

Off through the forest the girl went, until she came to the inn. When the innkeeper greeted her, she hardly recognized her oldest brother, for he was fat and his voice wheezed as he spoke. "Come home!" she said. "Father must see you, for he wishes to know if you have found the meaning of life." "The meaning of life?" he replied. "What meaning can there be, but a handsome living, and good bed and board? I cannot leave my inn, but here, give him this purse of gold so he will know that I have not forgotten him."

On she traveled until she came to a great castle. Outside the gate a band of soldiers were drilling. When the leader greeted her, she hardly recognized her second brother, for he was so strong and his voice thundered out orders. "Come home!" she said. "Father must see you, for he wishes to know if you have found the meaning of life." "The meaning of life?" he replied. "What meaning can there be, but the clash of arms and the glory of victory. I cannot leave my men, but here, give him this cloak so he will know that I have not forgotten him."

She traveled further until she come to a monastery. When the abbot greeted her, she hardly recognized her third brother, for he was so thin and pale, but his voice was soft and melodious. "Come home!" she said. "Father must see you, for he wishes to know if you have found the meaning of life." "The meaning of life?" he replied. "What meaning can there be, but to study and pray to God above. I cannot leave my abbey, but here, give him this casket of healing herbs so he will know that I have not forgotten him."

As the girl turned homeward, she thought about what her brothers had said. They all said they had found the meaning of life, yet each had a different answer, and none could spare a few days to see his ailing father.

Lost deep in thought, the girl did not see the poor beggar until she had almost passed him. "Have pity!" the man cried, "A penny that I may buy bread for my little children." The girl drew out the purse her brother had given her and gave it to the man. "Feed your family," she said, "and suffer no more." "The Lord be with you." the man replied.

Homeward she walked, still thinking about her brothers. As night fell, she drew her brother's cloak more closely around her shoulders. Sitting by the side of the road, she saw a woman huddled, her teeth chattering. "All is lost," cried the woman, "for surely this night I will die of cold." The girl took the cloak her brother had given her and put in around the woman. "Warm yourself," she said, "and suffer no more." "The Lord be with you." the woman replied.

The girl walked on, eager to return to her father. Looking ahead for the lights of the inn, she almost stumbled upon a bundle in the road. It was a young child, whimpering and feverish. The girl carried him into the inn, gave him the herbs that her brother had given her. "Be healed," she said, "and suffer no more." "The Lord be with you," the child replied.

The next morning the girl walked home. As she opened the door, her father called out, "Did you find them? Have you brought them with you? The girl told her father how her brothers were, what they were doing, and why they could not come. "And did they send nothing? No message, no gift?" her father cried. The girl told him about the beggar man, the poor woman, and the sick child, and how she had given the gifts to them.

"So you come empty handed, with nothing, nothing at all?" he cried. "No father," she replied, "I do have something for you. I have found the answer to your question." "Then tell me, tell me!" he pleaded. The girl leaned over the bed and whispered one word in her father's ear. Peace and joy filled her father's face as he lay back and closed his eyes, for his question had been answered.

AUTUMN

Roberto Trostli

It was late autumn, and the last days of warmth and sunshine had fled. In her hive, the honey bee was making her final preparations for winter. How busy she had been all spring, seeking out fragrant flowers, gathering their pollen and nectar, and carrying them back to the hive for honey. All summer long she had worked building the hive, making the countless six sided rooms to store the honey for winter food. As the days had grown colder, she had helped narrow the entrances to the hive so that the North wind could not blow in and freeze the bees. After one last great meal of honey, the bee huddled next to with her sisters for warmth, and slowly fell into a drowsy sleep. She would sleep through the short cold days ahead. If the winter sun shone warmly and the snow thawed, perhaps she would awake. Looking out over the snowy land, she would see no reason to leave the warm hive. After another meal of honey, she would go back to her snug bed with her sisters and sleep again until the spring sun would bring back the sweet flowers.

It was late autumn, and the last days of warmth and sunshine had fled. Soon the frost would lie thickly on the grasses, and the edges of the pond would freeze. On the bottom, buried deep in the soft mud, lay the bullfrog. He had been born that spring from a tiny translucent egg that had floated among the water weeds. He had become a shiny black tadpole with a pointy tail, wiggling through the waters, exploring his new home. Soon he had begun to change—sprouted back legs, then front legs, and his tail had fallen off! Now he could no longer live under water, but had to come to the surface to breathe. All summer long he had basked in the sun by day, lazily floating half-submerged. In the evenings he had joined the frog chorus, croaking and calling with full voice. Now he was tired and sluggish. He had made a small burrow in the mud and had settled in. Soon he would fall asleep, a sleep near unto death. On the bottom he would lie, barely breathing, barely living, until the warm sun would melt the ice on the pond, and all life would start to stir again.

It was late autumn, and the last days of warmth and sunshine had fled. With them had fled the barn swallow, for he cannot stand the cold. In the spring he had flown north in a great flock of swallows, until he had come to the familiar fields of the farm where she was born. He and his mate had built their nest out of mud, and there he had warmed the eggs and raised their two little ones. All summer long he had flitted and flown over the meadows and swamps, feeding on small flying insects. As the days had grown shorter, the swallow had begun to feel restless and impatient. Other swallows had gathered calling and chattering with each other about the journey ahead. Together they had flown southward to the lands where the snow never falls. There they would build nests and wait until the winter was past before returning north again.

It was late autumn, and the last days of warmth and sunshine had fled. As the last few leaves had fallen to the ground, the mother bear had gathered them, readying the bed in her den for winter. All spring and summer she had wandered through the meadows and woods, eating berries, fruits, and grubs. She had scooped fish and frogs out of the streams and had chased and caught chipmunks. One day she had found a hive of wild bees and had gorged herself with honey. She had grown round and plump, with a fat layer of blubber underneath her warm thick fur. As the days had grown colder, she had begun to feel tired, less eager to wander and explore. All she wanted to do now was sleep. When the snow would begin to fall, she would walk outside for the last time, then settle down in her bed of rustling leaves, and fall into her deep winter sleep. Many weeks would pass before the pangs of hunger and thirst would stir her awake. She would wander outside, foraging for food, the memories of summer's plenty still dimly in her mind. Perhaps her footprints would be seen near the houses, where the garbage cans of food beckoned. Then she would return to her den and her warm bed, and sleep again, waiting for spring, for the time of year when life quickens and stirs.

THE LIGHT OF MEN

Roberto Trostli

For many months Father Sun had shone down on the earth with all his might. He had warmed the snow until it melted, and the streams had run once again, singing their merry songs. He had warmed the earth until the seeds had sprouted and grown, and the trees had sent out their tender green leaves and dainty blossoms. He had warmed the air until the fruits had swelled and ripened. All through the summer he had beamed down upon the fields of golden corn and orange pumpkins. In the autumn the trees reflected his warm gaze in their gold and scarlet leaves. Now he was tired and needed to rest.

Mother Moon saw how tired Father Sun was and how old he looked. In the spring he had been young and fresh, looking down on the earth with his strong, bright gaze. He had needed so little sleep; all through the summer he had stayed up late into the evening so that he could look over the richness of the earth just a little longer. Now he was tired and always needed to sleep. His glance had become duller and his light dimmer. By late afternoon he was ready to sleep.

Mother Moon grew worried and said to Father Sun, "You need to rest, or you will never regain your strength by springtime. Let me shine upon the earth and warm it with my light." Father Sun agreed with a weary nod and thanked her.

Every night Mother Moon shone down on the earth with all her might. In the dark sky she blazed like silver, lighting the way of tired travelers. But Mother Moon was not as strong as Father sun; try as she might, she could not make up for his fading light. In the course of a month, she too needed more and more rest. Finally there was but a sliver of her to be seen, and the nights grew darker.

Mother Moon called her sons and daughters to her and said, "Your father is weary from his labors last year. I have tried to light the earth, but my strength is not equal to the task. I need your help that man may not have to live in cold and darkness."

The stars and planets shone as brightly as they could, sparkling like jewels in the dark sky. Each night they swept across the sky, and even in the dim morning light the brightest of them could be seen. But try as they might the stars and planets were not able to light the earth; all they could do was guide weary wanderers on their way.

The nights grew longer and darker. As the nights passed, however, the stars began to notice something. They awakened their mother and said, "Look down on the earth. Each night it has become brighter." Mother Moon saw that the earth was shining with a dim light. "What could it be?" she wondered. "Is it the lamps in the windows, or the fires on the hearths?"

It was the dead of winter. On the longest and darkest night of the year, Father Sun and Mother Moon slept soundly, and the stars swept in their courses. But the earth was not dark; with each passing hour it grew ever more light. The stars awakened their mother. "Look," they said, the earth is gleaming!" Mother Moon looked and saw that the earth shone brightly with radiant light. "What can it be?" they asked. "I do not know," she answered. "Let us ask Father Sun."

It was midnight, and Father Sun was awakened from his long sleep. He looked down upon the earth, and indeed, it was shining as bright as day. "From where does this light come?" asked his children. "It is brighter than lamplight and warmer than firelight!"

Father Sun cast his glance far down to earth. "That light is the light of men," he said. In the darkest night, a new sun is born in the human heart."

HOW THE SEEDS WERE SCATTERED

Roberto Trostli

When we walk by a farm, we see neat gardens of vegetables, fields of grains all planted in straight furrows, and orderly orchards with their rows of trees. Each plant has its place among others of its kind. How is it then, when we walk through the woodlands and meadows, that the plants grow all together, mixed together, topsy turvy? It wasn't always this way...

Long, long ago, when the earth was young, Mother Nature's garden was neater more orderly than the best kept farm. In the forests, trees were planted in neat stands. Oaks grew in great groves, pines soared skyward in straight rows; there were stands of maple, beech, spruce, and hemlock, each growing among its own kind. The forest clearings were lined with borders of ferns and mosses, with bunches of sweet violets at each corner. The meadows too had been carefully planned: in one only goldenrod grew, in another only chicory; there were meadows entirely of daisies stretching in a sea of white and others of asters rippling in purple waves. The byways were lined with blackberry blossoms, and here and there were clumps of wild roses. Every place on the earth displayed Mother Nature's love and care. For years, the plants thrived and grew; all was at peace, until. . .

One day, a restless daisy turned to her neighbor and said, "I wish I could move away! I'm tired of all this daisy talk! Don't you wish you could see more of the world?" "Yes," answered her friend, "Much as I like living among my friends and relations, I'm ready for a change, but what can we do?" "I don't know," answered the first daisy, but I'm not willing to remain here forever." Some other daisies overheard what they said, and soon the field was a-whisper with talk of moving away, seeing the world, and making new friends.

Mother Nature overheard their talk and was sad. She could not bear for any of her children to be unhappy. "What can be done?" she wondered. "They cannot move. All the plants have their appointed places in my garden. I will ask Father Sun. Perhaps he will give me some good advice."

The next morning Mother Nature went to Father Sun and told him what she had heard. "What can I do?" she asked. "Don't do a thing," Father Sun replied, "leave them alone and they will soon forget their troubles."

But the daisies didn't forget. They spoke of nothing else, and soon the goldenrod and the chicory in the neighboring fields were also talking of moving away and seeing the world. Mother Nature overheard their talk and thought, "I must do something. I will ask Sister Rain. Perhaps she will give me some good advice."

That afternoon Mother Nature went to Sister Rain and told her what she had heard. Sister Rain remained lost in thought for a long time. Finally she said, "I'm so sorry to hear that the flowers are unhappy. But what can be done? You can't transplant them all. I'm afraid they will simply have to stay where they are and accept their lot."

The next day, as Mother Nature roamed over the earth, she heard nothing but eager talk of the future and far-off places. "I must do something," she thought. "I will ask Brother Wind. Perhaps he will give me some good advice."

That evening Mother Nature went to Brother Wind and told him what she had heard. Hardly had she finished before Brother Wind said, "I know exactly what to do! Tell the flowers that they can't be

transplanted now, but if they wait patiently until next year, their wish will be granted." "But what will you do?" asked Mother Nature. "Just wait and see," said Brother Wind, "wait and see."

All that week Mother Nature roamed the earth promising the flowers that if they waited patiently until next year, their wishes would be granted. They thanked her gratefully, and the fields were full of joyful talk of what the new year would bring.

Meanwhile, Brother Wind was busy. He summoned his helpers and told them what to do. All summer long, the wind fairies watched the flowers carefully. When they were dropped their seeds, the wind fairies caught the seeds in their fingers and flew over the fields, scattering the seeds here and there. Through the summer and early autumn the wind fairies did their work. Then winter came, and covered the earth with a blanket of snow.

Finally spring returned, and Father Sun warmed the earth once again with his bright warm rays. The seeds sprouted. The green shoots poked their heads above the earth. The plants grew leaves, then buds. As Spring turned into Summer, the buds opened. "Hurrah!" cried the white daisies, when they found themselves scattered among the goldenrod and the blue chicory. "Hurrah!" cried the red poppies, when they found themselves growing among the blue cornflowers and purple asters. "Hurrah!" cried the black-eyed Susans, when they found themselves flowering among the white Queen Anne's lace and the purple lupines. "Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!" cried all the flowers, as they looked around at the new sights and made new friends.

Mother Nature heard their cries and looked down at the earth. Gone were the neat patches of white, gold, and blue. Gone were the ordered borders of pink and purple. Gone were the winding rows of white and yellow. Instead the fields and meadows, the highways and byways were awash in a splashes of color. Mother Nature's heart swelled with joy. She had never seen anything more beautiful. "Next year I will do more!" She promised. "Each year I will do more; the whole earth shall reflect God's glory.

But that, dear children, is another story.

HOW THE SEEDS WERE SCATTERED - PART 2

Roberto Trostli

As spring turned to summer Mother Nature marveled at the splendor of the flowers in the fields and meadows. She had never expected that they could look so beautiful all mixed together. She was not the only one that noticed the changes. The bushes and shrubs along the highways and byways noticed and wondered why they could not move away and see new sights. The trees of the forest in their stately groves noticed and wondered why they had to live among their own kind and never meet new friends. It didn't seem fair: if the flowers could move away from their appointed places, couldn't the trees and shrubs be granted the same privilege?

Throughout the summer Mother Nature overheard their conversations and was sad. She had promised that she would do more, but what more could she do? Already the wind fairies were complaining; they were not used to such hard work. Because they had to watch the flowers so carefully, they had no time to play in the warm summer sky. It didn't seem likely that they would even be willing to gather and scatter the flower seeds, much less help with the trees and shrubs. But who else could help?

One morning Mother Nature went to Father Sun and told him her problem. "What more can I do?" she asked. "I want to help the trees and shrubs, but I don't know how." "You've done enough." said Father Sun. "If you start giving into every request, you'll never hear the end of it. Leave the trees and shrubs alone; they'll get over it."

But the trees and shrubs didn't get over it. When they saw how happy the flowers were to be growing in new places, they yearned to live elsewhere. They spoke bitterly about the injustice that had been done, and their leaves and branches drooped. Mother Nature saw how unhappy they were and grew even sadder. "Who else could help?" she wondered.

One afternoon she went to see Sister Rain and described her problem. "What more can I do?" she asked. "I want to help the trees and shrubs, but I don't know how." Sister Rain thought a long time before answering. "There's nothing to be done," she said. "If Brother Wind can't help you, the trees and shrubs will just have to suffer and accept their lot."

Mother Nature was not satisfied. At last she went to Brother Wind. "I know that I can't ask you to do more," she said, "but perhaps you have an idea of what I can do." Brother Wind didn't answer immediately, but soon his face grew cheery and he said, "I know just what to do. I can help you, but you'll also need some other helpers." "Tell me!" Mother Nature begged, and Brother Wind told her his plan.

"Last summer my wind fairies worked hard." he said, "They had fun and were glad to help, but I don't think that they are willing to do as much this year. So we must find a way to scatter most of the flower seeds without the wind fairies help. "But how can we do that?" asked Mother Nature. "It's easy!" said Brother Wind. "The flowers' seeds must fly to their new homes by themselves." "By themselves?" asked Mother Nature. "Yes," said Brother Wind, "and here's how: my wind fairies will show them how to make their seeds so that I can carry and scatter them with my breath whenever I blow." "What a wonderful idea!" said Mother Nature, "but do you think the wind fairies will help?" "They will if I ask them to." said Brother Wind.

"But what about the trees and shrubs?" asked Mother Nature. "You haven't even mentioned them." "I can't help you there," said Brother Wind. Mother Nature smile left her lips, "but I know who can," continued Brother Wind. "Who?" asked Mother Nature. Brother Wind whispered something in her ear. Mother

Nature's face brightened, and she said, "Of course! I should have thought of them! Thank you, thank you Brother Wind!"

All summer long the wind fairies taught the plants how to prepare their seeds to fly far away. Some plants, like the grasses made their seeds so small that they were just carried by the wind. Others, like the dandelion or the milkweed, fixed silken hairs onto their seeds to act like parachutes which were carried by even the slightest breeze. Some, like the jewelweed, stored their seeds in seed pods that were like catapults. If anything brushed against them, the seeds would shoot out and fall far away from the mother plant. "How ingenious!" said Mother Nature, and she thanked the wind fairies for all their help.

But what about the trees and shrubs? Who was to help them? The next day after talking to Brother Wind, Mother Nature called all the animals and birds to her and described her predicament. She asked them to think of ways they could help her, and before long they began to offer suggestions. "We could help the oaks and nut trees," said the squirrels. "Every fall we'll gather their acorns and nuts and bury them. Those we don't eat will sprout and grow where we planted them." "And we could help the berry bushes," said the birds. "We'll eat the berries and carry the seeds to far-off places. Wherever we drop them, they can grow." "And I have a suggestion for the maple trees," said a cricket, "they can put little wings on their seeds so that the seeds will fly spinning through the air and land far away from their parents." "And I know what we should do about the burdock!" said a rabbit. "They can put little spiky hairs on their seed pods, and they'll catch on our fur as we're running past. When we pick out the burs, the seeds will drop in a new place and grow there." "Splendid!" cried Mother Nature. "Splendid! I knew that you would be able to help me."

All summer long and into autumn, the animals helped the trees and shrubs. The trees and shrubs stopped grumbling, and everyone was happy to be working together, and in such ingenious ways! Winter came and covered the earth with a blanket of snow. Then Father Sun's shone bright again, and his warm rays melted the snow. The seeds and nuts swelled and sprouted. They thrust their heads above the ground, grew stems and leaves. "Hurrah!" cried the young oak trees as they found themselves growing among the beeches and maples. "Hurrah!" cried the young blackberry bushes as they found themselves growing among the sumac and hawthorn. "Hurrah!" cried all the flowers as they found themselves scattered even farther afield than the year before. "Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!" cried all the plants as they saw new sights and made new friends.

Mother Nature heard their joyous cries and looked down at the earth. Gone was the neat garden she had planted so many years ago. All of the plants and trees, the flowers and shrubs grew in glorious abandon. Gone was the careful order she had planned. In its place was a wild, fresh beauty that she could never have imagined. Her heart swelled with joy. She had kept her promise. The whole earth did reflect God's glory.

A GRAIN OF SAND

Roberto Trostli

On the bottom of the ocean lay a grain of sand, sparkling like a jewel in the faint sunlight. Once before he had lain on the ocean bottom, but that had been years before, many thousands of years before. How he had returned to the same place is quite an adventure.

Long ago, a grain of sand lay on the ocean bottom, amid countless other grains. Every day the river washed new sand into the sea, and they floated out over the bottom, gently setting in their sandy beds. Over the years and centuries, these beds became deep and thick, and the grain of sand was covered by many hundreds of feet of sandy sediment. The weight of these sediments had pushed down upon him with great pressure. Slowly he felt himself bonding together with other grains of sand, until they had formed sheets of rock called sandstone.

One day the grain of sand realized that he was slowly moving downwards. The movement was so slow and gentle, that he hardly felt it, but if he paid careful attention, he could tell that he was moving. One day the movement grew greater. The ocean floor was shaking, and the beds of sandstone cracked and splintered. The shaking stopped that day, though there were smaller tremors during the next few weeks. The movement continued, however, until the grain of sand was buried under ever deeper layers of the ocean floor.

It was growing hotter where the grain of sand lay, and in the heat, he felt himself growing brighter and clearer. As he looked about him he saw that the entire bed of sandstone was being transformed, changing from dullish red and brown into shining white quartzite.

As the temperature grew hotter, the movement downwards continued, and the grain of sand was sinking ever farther under the crust of the earth. He passed other layers of rock—slate, marble, and then granite—as he moved downwards. Now the heat was fierce, and the grain of sand felt himself melting. He was no longer solid rock, but a clear sticky fluid that deeper through the deeper layers of the earth's mantle.

One day the grain of sand realized that he had stopped moving downwards. Now he lay in a great lake of liquid rock. The lake was hot, and every so often bubbles of gas swelled and burst in its depths. Now the liquid rock began slowly to move upwards, back through cracks and crevices of the layers of bedrock. Sometimes the movement was slow and gradual; sometimes the rock suddenly gave way and a torrent of molten rock rushed into the empty space. Ever upward traveled the grain of sand, until finally he came to rest in a cave.

The temperature was cooler here, and the liquid rock next to the wall of the cave began to harden. One day the grain of sand felt himself begin to harden back into a solid form. Together with countless other grains of sand, he was now part of a quartz crystal. As the liquid rock hardened over the years the inside of the cave became completely encrusted with quartz crystals. What a pity that the sun could not shine into its depths and be reflected off their many smooth facets!

Although the grain of sand had come to rest, his bed was not completely quiet. Every so often the earth shook a little, and pieces of the crystals would break off. Every winter and spring, as the earth froze and then thawed, the cave shook ever so slightly. Soon the roots of trees began to creep into the roof of the cave, breaking up the rocky walls.

One day the grain of sand saw the sunlight again. There had been a mighty earthquake, and the mudslides had ripped the trees off the mountainside. The cave had split open and the bright sun shone in. Now wind

and water swept into the cave, slowly weathering the rocks. Animals used the cave for shelter, and their rough scratching dislodged some stones, including the one containing the grain of sand.

Out onto the open mountainside he was pushed, exposed to sun and wind. The following spring, he was carried quickly down the slopes in a rushing stream of melted snow. Down the streambed he tumbled, bumping into other rocks.

Years passed, and the rock was carried ever farther downstream. He had grown smaller and smoother now. His bright white crystals no longer shone, for his surface was all scratched by the many bumps he had received. Ever farther down the stream he was carried, rushing in a flood or settling for a whole summer during a drought. Ever smaller he became, from a rock, to a pebble, finally to a grain of sand.

The stream was no longer so rough, for it had become a mighty river carrying its load of silt and sand to the sea. Mixed in the sand was the tiny grain. One day the grain of sand felt the current slacken. Slowly he drifted to the bottom. The water was no longer fresh, but mixed with salt. He had reached the ocean!

In the course of the next months, the gentle ocean currents carried the grain of sand farther out to sea. At last he came to rest in a great sandy bed, near the place where he had begun his great journey. That journey had carried him to the depths of the earth and to the heights of mountains. He had been pushed and pressed, hurried and heated, but ever had he remained his own shining self.

A DROP OF WATER

Roberto Trostli

It was autumn, and on Mother Ocean's cool bosom lay a drop of water. Above her, the silver moon shone softly and the stars twinkled merrily. Below her, the ocean currents swirled gently, carrying the drop of water on her way. All was peaceful and quiet, but the drop of water was wide awake, thinking of far-off lands whose shores she had never seen, of which she knew nothing. Would she ever see the world?

Slowly the night passed and the pink dawn began to glimmer in the east. Soon Father Sun's rays were shining brightly upon the ocean, warming the cool waters. Now the morning breeze sprang up as Brother Wind blew briskly over the sea, stirring up waves. Over and again the drop water was lifted up, then swept down again. A wave tossed her high in the air, and she sparkled and shone in the light. Up again she was flung, but this time, she did not fall. How light she felt, how shimmery! Up and up she rose, carried by Brother Wind's soft breath. With her were many other drops of water, sisters and brothers, friends and relations, rising in a fine mist above the ocean.

Below her the waves grew smaller and smaller, until the drop of water could hardly see that the ocean's ruffled surface. How long or far she flew, she never knew, but later she remembered shores and valleys, plains and mountains. How high she was—and how cold! Feeling herself growing stiff, the drop of water shivered in fear. She was chilled through. To the left she shivered, and to the right. Up and down she shivered; forward and back, but nothing could stop her from freezing. Looking around her, she noticed that all of her fellows were frozen too, each into a delicate six sided form. Every one was different, with lacy arms or bold plates, but all of them had six sides. She looked down at herself. She had become a snowflake too! As a mountaintop loomed near, the drop of water felt herself falling, gently drifting down with countless other snowflakes. Softly she landed on the mountain, glad to be at rest once again. Covered and surrounded by her friends, the drop of water fell into a deep, contented sleep.

Days and weeks passed, and still the drop of water slept on the mountain. One day she awoke. She was no longer cold and stiff. Father Sun had warmed her through, and her lacy form had melted. Through the layers of snow she oozed, wondering what lay below. Soon she touched something; it was hard and rough. She was lying on the earth. Into a tiny hole she slipped, and she explored the small channels underground. How strange and dark they were—and how beautiful! All around were the glistening lights of quartz and mica. And here and there were tiny specks of gold dust. Everywhere she looked she saw delicate root hairs of plants, and there were the gnomes bringing them water that the plants might drink!

Down another slanted channel she slipped, then all of a sudden the drop of water came out of the side of the mountain and ran along a tiny stream bed. It was lined with tiny pebbles, worn the spring streams of bygone years. Down the mountainside she rushed, now laughing for joy, now gasping in fright, as she sped around the sharp, sudden turns. For weeks she coursed down the mountainside, feeling the stream growing in strength beneath her. The stream roared round boulders, pushing them out of its way, sending them off with a crash; it tore at tree roots, digging away at the earth with strong and eager fingers. Nothing could resist its flow.

Finally the drop of water entered a river, swollen with spring rains and winters snows, but traveling more slowly than the stream. Here she had a chance to look at her surroundings: the tall trees, the fertile farm fields, and here and there the houses from whose porches children fished. One night she passed under a bridge, and then she saw the dazzling lights of a city sparkling above her.

As it grew wider, the river had slowed. All summer long the drop of water watched with awe the sights above and around her: the tugboats and barges and the large merchant ships carrying cargo to the port. One

day she tasted a familiar taste which reminded her of her childhood, of the days when she wondered if she would ever see the wide world.

It was evening when she reached the mouth of the river and was swept out to sea. Above her, the silver moon shone softly and the stars twinkled merrily. Below her, the ocean currents swirled gently, carrying the drop of water on her way. All was peaceful and quiet. She was home again.

THE TREES

Roberto Trostli

Long ago when the earth was young, all the trees lived in the hot tropics where summer never ends. In mighty forests they grew, warmed by the bright sun which shone every day, bathed by the soft rains which fell every evening. They grew in great numbers, all mixed together in their many varieties. The trees were happy in the rain forest. They liked the animals that lived among them--the lively monkeys, the stealthy panther, the raucous parrots, and the giant pythons. They liked the bright-colored flowers that bloomed in the clearings, and the clouds of delicate butterflies that settled on the moist ground.

Not all the trees were content, however. The oaks and maples didn't like the constant noise and bustle of the animals, birds, and insects. The pines didn't like having so many different kinds of trees growing so mixed together so that you could hardly find a friend, and the spruces and firs didn't like being so crowded in the moist, clammy heat.

"Let us move away!" called a mighty oak tree to a slender maple one day. "Let us move away!" cried a lofty pine to its fellow across the clearing. "Let us move away!" whispered a scrubby spruce to a fir tree growing nearby. "Let us move away!" they called. "Away, away" came the echo.

Among the groves of the rainforest walked Mother Nature, listening to the trees. She had thought they would be happy living all together and was sad to hear their complaints. That night a deep sleep fell over the oaks and maples, over the pines and the spruces and firs. When they awoke, they found themselves in places they had never seen before.

The first thing the oaks and maples noticed when they awoke was the quiet. Gone was the constant chattering of monkeys, gone the raucous screeching of parrots, gone the annoying drone of insects. The forest where they now grew was still. As the sun rose, the soft cooing of the mourning doves could be heard. Leaves rustled softly as a chipmunk scampered off to bury a nut, and a majestic stag walked among the trees without a sound.

The first thing the pines noticed when they awoke was their friends on every side. Gone was the confusing variety of trees, gone the many vines and creepers that grew up the tree trunks, gone the forest floor littered with all matter of plant debris. The forest where they now grew had only fellow pines. The ground was covered with needles, and small clumps of ferns grew here and there in the clearings. The air was cool and fresh with a lovely scent.

The first thing the firs and spruces noticed when they awoke was the bracing air. Gone was the damp and mist of the rainforest, gone the heat and confusion of many trees growing in tangled webs. The forest where they now grew had plenty of space. Each fir grew in her own spot, each spruce had room to spread his branches. The trees could see far over the tundra, where the lonely hawk circled high.

"Thank you!" called the oaks and maples to Mother Nature. "Thank you!" cried the pines. "Thank you, thank you!" whispered the firs and spruces. Mother Nature heard their voices and smiled. Her children were happy again.

THE TREES, PART 2

Roberto Trostli

The months passed, and the oaks and maples were happy. How they relished the quiet of their woodland home! Slowly the summer days passed and the days grew shorter, the nights cooler. One morning the forest was covered with a delicate crystals of frost, which glistened like jewels in the dawn's early light. When the oaks looked at the maples, they were astonished at what they saw: the leaves of the maples had turned color. Gone were the drab greens of late summer. Everywhere leaves were a brilliant yellow, blazing orange, or flaming red. The forest was filled with the fire of the colored leaves. They called to the maples, who looked their leaves in astonishment. The maples looked at the oak trees, whose leaves had turned brown in the night. The oaks, who hadn't noticed their own new colors rustled in surprise "How lovely!" cried the oaks. "How lovely!" the maples answered. Mother Nature heard their voices and smiled.

The months passed and the pines were happy. They rustled and whispered, talking to their friends in their forest home. It was cold, and the trees shivered as the winter wind blew through their branches. The days were short now, the nights long and bitter cold. One night something awakened the pines. The forest was dark and still, but the trees felt a gentle breath wafting through their branches. What could it be? Birds? Insects? The pines looked around but could not see anything in darkness. They could not sleep that night, and waited eagerly for morning. The first glimmer of grey dawn revealed a sight the pines had never seen: the forest was covered with soft, white snow. It was everywhere, resting on the branches, nestling among the needles, and covering the ground in a blanket of white. "How lovely!" cried the pine trees. "How lovely!" Mother Nature heard their voices and smiled.

The months passed, and the firs and spruces were happy in the far northlands. The days grew colder and the grasses withered and turned brown. The lakes and ponds began to freeze, and each day the geese flew southwards in great flocks, filling the air with their farewells. The nights were long and cold now, and the trees watched the stars sweeping majestically across the sky. Each day the sun rose lower on the horizon and made a low, flat arc across the southern sky. Finally the day came when the sun did not rise at all. The firs and spruces looked at each other in surprise, wondering whether Father Sun would ever come again. Darkness surrounded them, and the stars twinkled brightly.

Then, in the darkness, there was a shimmer, a shimmer of light, yellow, red, blue, and violet. The colors flashed and flickered in dancing veils. The sky was bright now, hung with curtains of light. The trees had never seen anything more beautiful. "How lovely!" cried the firs, "How lovely!" echoed the spruces. Mother Nature heard their voices and smiled. Her children were happy, and the world was filled with splendor.

THE CHILDREN OF THE RAIN

Roberto Trostli

It happened once long ago that Sister Rain went to Mother Nature with a problem. "It's my children," said Sister Rain. I just don't know what to do with them anymore." "What do you mean?" asked Mother Nature. "It's hard to describe." said Sister Rain. "Try anyway," said Mother Nature, "I'm sure it will become clear."

"Take for instance my son Hail," said Sister Rain. "He's so wild, always racing around, throwing himself into things. He doesn't even know how destructive he is. Last week he flattened a whole garden of beautiful flowers and he didn't even notice, he was so anxious to show that he was the fastest of us all."

"Then there's my daughter Mist," continued Sister Rain. She's so dreamy, she can't remember a thing. I tell her to follow me, and first thing I know she's gone, drifted into a hollow to look at some ferns or dawdling under a bridge admiring the little pools."

"My twins are just as exasperating," said Sister Rain. Flake loves to dance, and I must admit, she's very good at it. But ask her to water the fields and she flits around here and there. Her brother Frost is a little more reliable, but he can't resist a chance to paint everything with his brush. By the time he's done, I'm way behind with my chores.

"And then there's Dew, bless her heart." She's such so thorough and picky that she never finishes any of her jobs. Every blade of grass must glisten just so, every strand of a spider web has to have the exact same number of drops. It's a wonder I get anything done when she's around."

"Do you have any ideas what I can do?, asked Sister Rain. Mother Nature smiled her mysterious smile. "Yes," she answered, "but I want to talk to your children first."

That afternoon Mother Nature spoke with Hail, Mist, Flake, Frost, and Dew. They were eager to hear what their grandmother had to say, for they knew that their mother had been irritable and unhappy lately, and they didn't know what to do about it. Mother Nature told them what she had in mind and asked them if they would do what she asked. Gladly they agreed to her plan, for it made perfect sense to them.

While Mother Nature was done talking to her grandchildren, Sister Rain waited patiently. She was curious about the pleased and mysterious looks her children gave her as they left. "Well, what was that all about?" asked Sister Rain. "Here's what I suggest," said Mother Nature. "I've discussed it with your children, and they are amenable."

"You have a great deal to do, my daughter, and it's clear you need help, but the right kind of help. When you described your children to me yesterday, you gave me an idea Each of your children has special talents, but you haven't found a way to use them. They are eager to help you, but they don't seem to know what's most important or how they can be most useful. What's needed is that each one does what he or she does best, so here's what I suggest:

In the summertime, let Hail help you. You know he loves to race after his uncle Thunder and dash about with his cousin Lightning. Put his energy to use when you need to water the dry and thirsty fields.

In the fall, let Mist help you. She will wrap herself around the golden leaves without disturbing them, gently watering the autumn plants. If she forgets or loses herself in her thoughts, there's nothing to worry about, for the plants do not need so much moisture at that time.

As for Flake and Frost, let them be your winter helpers. On the coldest days Flake won't mind dancing through the hills and fields, dusting them with snow. And on those clear cold winter nights Frost can paint every window pane to his heart's delight.

In spring, let Dew do her work. You need a careful helper then, for the earth is thirsty and the plants need moisture to grow. Set her to work in the evenings, when she can take as long as she likes, and in the morning, all will admire her handiwork.

"And they won't mind only working for a season?" asked Sister Rain. "On the contrary," replied Mother Nature, "they would be grateful to be able to help by doing what they do best."

"Thank you, Mother Nature!" cried Sister Rain. "I knew I could count on you to help me." Mother Nature smiled pleased to know that she had helped her children once again.

THE STREAM

Roberto Trostli

All winter long the earth had been covered with a blanket of snow. Now Father Sun was regaining his strength and shining down upon the snowy hills and fields. Slowly the top layers of the snow began to melt, and trickles of water ran through the layers of snow and ice until they reached the frozen ground.

One little rivulet of water found himself in small rocky hollow. As the sun shone brighter, more water trickles joined him until the hollow was full. Finally, it could hold no more. The rivulet bulged over the edge and started on his course down the mountainside. Each day, as the snow melted, a small stream of water coursed down the path made by the rivulet. As the ground thawed, the pebbles became looser and the rivulet pushed them aside leaving a path where he had gone. All through the early spring he grew stronger each day until he became a little stream, but when all the snow had melted, the water decreased and soon the stream's bed was dry. So it remained throughout the summer and fall.

The following spring, the little stream ran full once more with the icy waters of melted snow. Now more water flowed in his bed, for many pebbles and rocks had been swept aside. Other little rivulets joined the stream, and now he flowed with greater speed and force. Each day he carved his bed deeper into the hillside. Sometimes a large rock stood in his path, and he would work all day to dislodge it. Sometimes fallen branches blocked his way, but he skilfully worked his way under or around them. So he flowed each spring for several years, before drying up again in the hot summer months.

Each year the stream became faster and deeper, flowing farther down the hillside. Finally one spring he made it all the way down to the valley, where the soil was softer. Each day the stream carved way at its banks, smoothing them with its rushing waters. The banks moved farther apart, and now the stream could be called a river. Merrily he wandered through the valley, seeking a larger river who would take him all the way to the sea.

As the years passed, the river continued to carve and smooth his bed. Gone were the little twists and turns where he had had to bend to go around rocks. Gone were the ripples and falls where trees or ledges blocked the way. The river ran smoother and straighter than ever before. Through the years the stones and pebbles that had lined the stream bed were ground down, and the fine coarse sand glistened in the sun when the river ran low in the summertime.

One winter the snows fell and fell, piling in ever deeper drifts in the hollow and hills. That spring the river ran swifter and harder than ever before, tearing away the footbridges that spanned its breadth, sweeping aside the docks that had been built on its banks. The bed of the river couldn't hold all the water, and he overflowed his banks, flooding the fields on either side. The force of the water carved away the soft farm land, digging a new bends here and there.

As years turned into centuries, the river grew broader and shallower, winding slowly and majestically through the valleys on his way to the sea. No longer straight and smooth, he curved and meandered through the fertile fields taking in new sights. He was no longer in a hurry, his waters ran smooth and still, reflecting the white clouds above. How long ago it seemed that he had been but a rivulet or melted snow or a fresh young stream coursing down the hillside! Now his grandchildren and great grandchildren fed his waters as he made his steady way onwards toward the sea.

THE STONES

Roberto Trostli

In the bottom of a quiet pool sat a stone. It was dark grey, and its edges were smooth and polished. It could hardly be seen in the mud as it sat there with water flowing over it.

One day, a new stone was swept into the pool. This stone was white, and its edges were rough with the sharp facets of many crystals. In the bottom of the pool it sat, reflecting the sunlight.

"Is there anyone here?" asked the white stone.

"Yes." answered a soft, mild voice.

"Where? Who are you? Come out so I can see you." demanded the white stone.

"Look harder," said the dark stone, "look down here in the mud."

"Oh--now I see you! Well, hello! Hello! Who are you?"

"My name is Shale. And who might you be?" asked the dark stone quietly.

"I am Quartz, you certainly must know of me."

"No," said Shale, but I would like to get to know you better. Where do you come from?"

"I've come all the way from the top of the mountain. The stream brought me here."

"But did you always live there?" asked Shale.

"No indeed! Mine is a long and glorious history. Do you want to hear it?"

"Yes, please." answered Shale, so this is the story Quartz told:

Long ago, long before the memories of men, I lay deep in the earth. I did not have my present form or color, but was part of a river of liquid rock. Red, orange, and yellow like flames we shone in the darkened earth. Into each crevice our river of rock flowed, into each cavern, seam, and vein. Down we were swept, or forced upwards through the roots of the mountains.

My part of the river flowed through the mountain down which this stream runs. Everywhere we seeped, seeking out the cracks in the solid rock. As time passed, I began to notice a difference. The river flowed more slowly, and our color changed from red and orange and yellow to white. Finally all movement ceased. I had become a solid rock.

One spring a mudslide swept away the covering of earth from the mountain where I lay. For the first time I saw the sun. How proud I was to reflect his colors in my crystal faces. The seasons passed, and I was slowly loosened from the surrounding rock by the freezes and thaws of winter and the heat of summer. One day, I finally broke free. A passing deer kicked me into the stream, and thus began my journey down the mountain.

"But what about you, Shale? Where do you come from?"

"I used to lie on the ledge overhanging the stream. " said Shale. "One day a piece of the ledge broke off and I fell into the stream. You wouldn't know it to look at me, but my edges were once sharper and more jagged than yours. The water has worn them smooth over the years."

"But did you always live on the ledge?" asked Quartz.

"No indeed! I too have a long history. Do you want to hear it?"

"Yes, please." answered Quartz, so this is the story Shale told:

"Long ago, long before the memories of men, I lay on the bottom of the sea. Each spring the streams and rivers that flow through the land had carved away at their banks carrying mud and silt down to the sea. From those fine sediments am I made. Far into the ocean drifted the mud, coming slowly to rest on the ocean floor. As centuries passed, the layers grew thicker and deeper. How heavy were the layers of mud above me. Slowly I was compressed, the particles of mud fused together into rock."

"If you were to see me before I was worn smooth by the stream, you would see my layers clearly."

"But how did you get from the bottom of the ocean to this place?" asked Quartz.

"Ah, that is the wonder of it," answered Shale. "Long I lay on the ocean floor, feeling the weight of the stone above me. One day I felt a tremor--the earth was shaking. Again and again it shook, and I could feel the rock splitting and cracking. I was lifted upwards a little, then all movement stopped. Little by little my bed of rock was lifted through the years. What a glorious day it was when I first saw the sky and felt the warm sun beaming upon me! The waters of the ocean receded, and I stood high above the plain, part of a great outcropping. A merry stream ran by on its way to the sea.

So passed the seasons for more years than I could count; summers with their blistering heat, winters with their freezing snows, springs with their rains, and autumns with their winds. Each year the outcropping weathered, became brittle, and began to crack. The roots of plants and trees pushed their way into the cracks until one day I felt myself pried away from the rest of the rock. Into the stream I fell, to be washed smooth by the endlessly rushing waters. Such is my story, and thus it is that you find me here.

"I'm so glad I met you;" said Quartz. "there's much I can learn from you, and what interesting tales you tell!"

"And I'm glad I met you!" replied Shale. "I look forward to hearing more stories from you as well."

THE STONES - PART 2

Roberto Trostli

For several days Quartz and Shale remained in the pool, entertaining each other with their stories. Then it began to rain, and the stream swelled and the waters rushed more swiftly. The two stones were swept downstream, and when they came to rest, they found themselves in a much bigger pool. As the water cleared and settled, they saw a large chunk of dull, chalky grey stone lying on the bottom.

Quartz addressed the rocks "Hello! Hello!" he cried. "My name is Quartz, and this is my friend Shale. "Are you a type of Quartz too?"

"No," replied one of the stones. "My name is Limestone."

"Are you a fire rock like me?" asked Quartz. "I see what look like crystals and facets in your side."

"No," said Limestone. "I was formed in the depths of the sea."

"So was I!" said Shale.

"Do you want to hear my story?" asked Limestone.

"Yes, please!" replied the two other stones, so this is the story Limestone told:

Long ago, long before the memories of men, oceans covered much of the world. The oceans were full of life, and countless thousands of tiny creatures swam through the warm waters. When these creatures died, their tiny skeletons and shells fell to the bottom and lay in the mud. Like a gentle rain they fell through the years, until they formed deep layers. Of the shells of these creatures am I made. If you look carefully, you will see the many little shells and traces of the creatures embedded in me.

Years passed, and as the layers grew deeper, I was covered over. The layers above me grew heavier, and slowly I was compressed into rock. Then the oceans grew shallower, and mud and silt from the rivers on land formed ever deeper layers.

"But how did you end up here?" asked Quartz.

"You know that part of the story," said Shale. "for Limestone must have been below me when I was formed. We were lifted together, but I didn't know her since he ended up farther down the hillside."

"Well I'm pleased to know you now." said Limestone. "Will you tell me your stories?"

"Gladly!" said Quartz and Shale.

Limestone listened eagerly to Quartz and Shale's stories, and all three felt lucky to have met such good company. The next day, another stone was swept into the pool. It was black like Shale, but there it had shiny facets like Quartz.

"Hello!" cried Quartz. "Who are you?"

"Hello," said the stone. "My name is Coal."

"Are you a kind of Shale?" asked Shale?

"No, no," answered Coal, "though I know you and your family well."

"How so?" asked Shale.

"Do you want to hear my story?" asked Coal.

"Yes, please," answered the other three stones, so this is the story Coal told:

Long ago, long before the memories of men, the earth was a much warmer place. The sun shone bright every day, soft rains fell in abundance, and plants grew in great number, towering upwards towards the heavens. Ferns were the size of trees, and trees lifted their branches many hundreds of feet above the earth. The rocks were covered with deep layers of moss, and grasses and herbs carpeted the earth. Plants grew so quickly and in such abundance that when plants died, they were covered over by other plants before there was time for them to return to the earth once again. Over the years, deep layers of plants were formed. Of these plants am I made.

"Why, you're much like me!" exclaimed Limestone, "for I am made of the bodies of tiny sea creatures."

"Yes," said Coal. "and like you, I sometimes carry a delicate imprint of a fern or branch within my depths."

"But how did you become hard?" asked Quartz.

"The layers grew deeper and sank into the soft ground. Then came a time of great rains and floods, and the rivers overran their banks and the oceans covered much of the land. Layers of earth and mud were swept down from the mountains and covered us up. Those layers were heavy, and slowly, I was pressed into rock.

"So you too were beneath me, there in the bottom of the sea!" cried Shale happily.

"Yes, I told you that I knew you well, for Shale is often found between my layers." answered Coal.

"And have you nothing in common with me?" asked Quartz, feeling left out.

"I do, and in more ways than you'd guess," answered Coal. "for when I burns, I glow with your colors--red, orange, and yellow. And if I remain long enough in the depths of earth, pressed by immeasurable weight of rock and heated by the fires that burn beneath the mountains, then all my darkness is transformed into the clearest light, and I become the hardest, clearest, and most precious of stones."

"How glad I am to have met you!" said Quartz happily.

"And I to meet the three of you," said Coal.

SPRING IS COMING!

Roberto Trostli

Spring is coming! Spring is coming! What are the signs of spring?

Listen to the drip, drip, drip of melting snow as it runs down the roofs in rivulets. Listen to the brook as it babbles, breaking out of its frozen fastness. The ice cracks and crazes, finally falling into the swollen stream.

The frozen earth is thawing; the ground feels spongy underfoot and our feet sink into the squishy mud that sucks at our boots and doesn't want to let go. Soon the plants will poke through the cold and crumbly crust, shoving aside the debris of winter, covering the earth with a new mantle of green.

Spring is coming! Spring is coming! What are the signs of spring?

The air is fresh with a tender moistness. Gone are the chilling winds that rushed around the eaves at night, that rattled down the chimney and whipped the branches against the side of the house. The spring breeze blows gently, caressing the young buds and shoots, calling them from their winter hiding places.

Spring is coming! Spring is coming! What are the signs of spring?

How early the sun rises! No more dark mornings lying abed waiting for his first faint rays to encourage us to arise. The sun shines bright now, warming the earth, the plants, and creatures, renewing hope and life.

Spring is coming! Spring is coming! What are the signs of spring?

The trees and bushes, the hedgerows, orchards, and meadows are full of birds. Their songs fill the early mornings, sometimes with sweet warbling of love, sometimes with loud, insistent cries of defiance to keep others at a distance. The evenings are graced by the wild geese flying on sturdy wings, heading northward to newly thawed lakes and ponds, where they will build new nests and bring forth their young.

Spring is coming! Spring is coming! What are the signs of spring?

The little creatures who slept through the winter are awaking. The moist earth is full of their tracks. At twilight you might catch a glimpse of them searching and scampering, venturing out of their homes and hiding places, looking at the world now born again. Soon the spotted fawns will walk beside the doe, the fox kits will tumble and wrestle by their dens, and the big black bear will teach her young to fish in the placid pools.

Spring is coming! Spring is coming! What are the signs of spring?

My heart is lighter, my gaze is brighter, there is new strength and spring to my step. Winter is gone; the snow has fled; the earth awakes again.

THE TWO KINGDOMS

Roberto Trostli

Once upon a time there were two kingdoms, as different from each other as any two kingdoms can be. One was mountainous and barren, with rocky hills and scorching deserts. The other had grassy plains and great tracts of woodlands, and it was bounded by the sea. Lest you think that the first kingdom was poor, let it be known that untold treasures of gold and silver and precious stones lay hidden deep within the mountains. Miners worked night and day to bring forth the great wealth from the earth, and the people of the kingdom lived in ease and luxury.

In the second kingdom, people had to work hard for a living: woodcutters cleared the great forests, sending the mighty tree trunks down the rivers to be sawn into wood; farmers broke the sod and tilled the soil, bringing forth crops by the sweat of their brow; and fishermen worked from dawn to dusk to try to eke out a living from the sea.

One day a rich man from the first kingdom took a pleasure trip and went to visit his cousin who lived in the second kingdom. When he arrived, he found his cousin in the field, trudging behind a team of oxen, plowing a furrow. The poor man's hands were calloused and hard, his face was wet with sweat, and his boots were caked with clay; nevertheless he was whistling a merry tune. The rich man hailed his cousin, who stopped his plowing only long enough to tell him to make himself at home and that he would join him in the evening.

That evening the two men sat and spoke together. "How can you live this way?" asked the rich man. "Look at you--you are little better than a peasant! Leave your farm and come live with me; I shall see to it that you shall not lack for riches."

"What sort of riches are these?" asked the poor man.

"Why--riches of every sort!" answered his cousin.

"Tell me about them," said the poor man.

"Indeed I will," the rich man replied. "In our kingdom, none of the king's subjects need work, for our work is done by hired laborers from neighboring lands. Such wealth lies beneath the ground that our king distributes it among his subjects and still has enough to make him the wealthiest and most powerful ruler on earth."

"And what do you do with your wealth?" asked the poor man.

"Anything I want," answered his cousin. "I have a grand home that lacks nothing; I eat the finest foods and drink the rarest wines; my servants fulfill my every need; pleasure, amusement, entertainment. I need not sow to reap a rich harvest. What more could a man want?"

"I am not sure such a life appeals to me." said the poor man.

"How could it not appeal to you?" asked his cousin in disbelief.

"I love to work," said the poor man, "and in your land you need not work. Work yields its own rewards. Through work a man comes to know himself. Here I reap what I sow; if I work hard, my family has plenty;

if not, we starve; if I look after my animals they thrive; if not, they suffer; if I care for the land it remains fertile; if not, it grows barren. Through work I create, and thus I feel myself closer to Him who created us all."

That night the rich man lay in bed thinking about what his cousin had said. He could not understand how someone could be content with so little. Yet he sensed that his poor cousin had something that he lacked in himself. "What is it?" he asked himself, "What is it that makes me think that he is far richer than I shall ever be?"

Work is love made visible,
And if you cannot work with love,
But only with distaste, it is better
That you should leave your work and
Sit at the gate of the temple and take
Alms from those who work with joy.