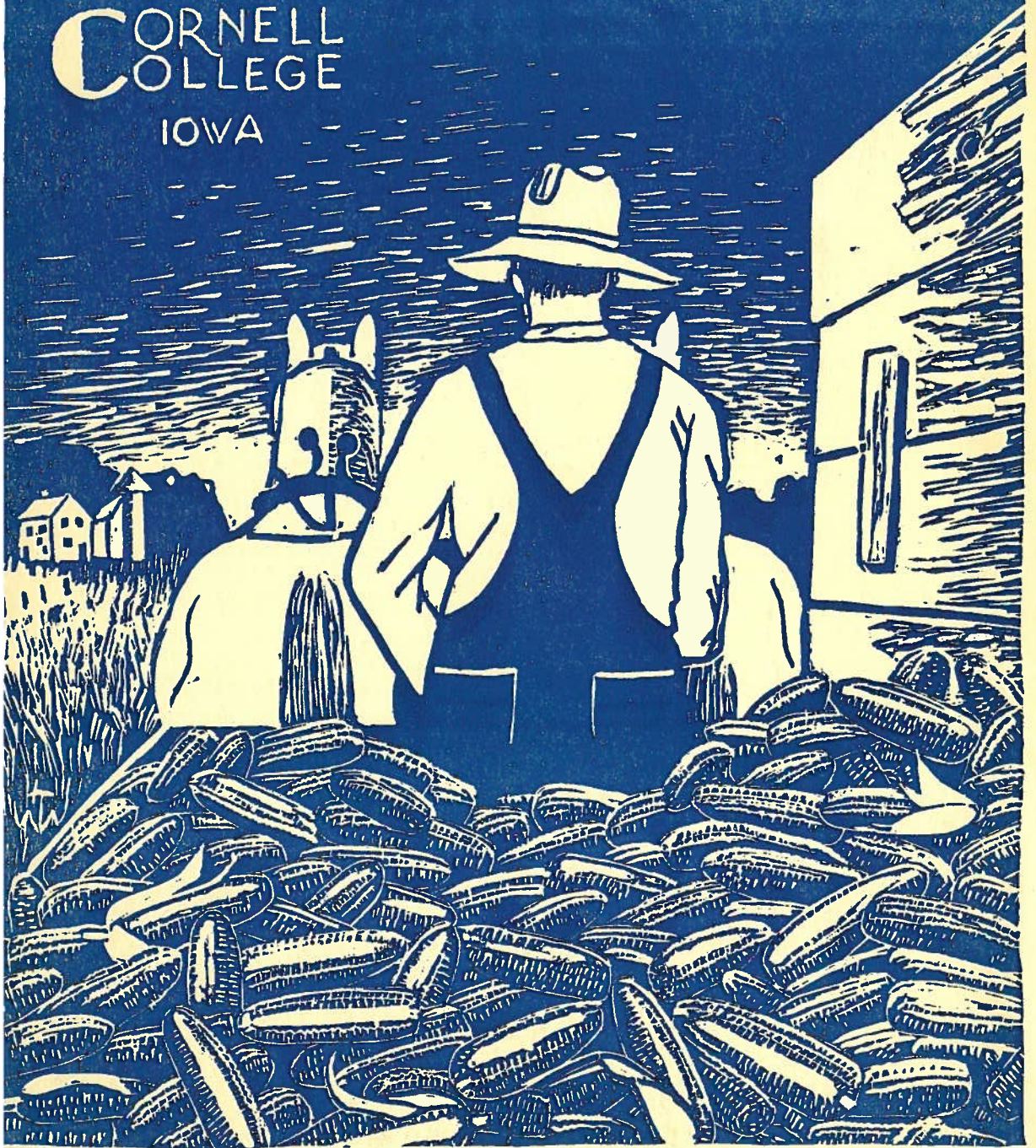


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HOW THE WOMAN GOT HER RING

A Too-True Story, with Abject Apologies to Kipling

In the High and Far-Off Times, Oh Best Beloved, when cliff-dwellers really dwelt in cliffs and cavemen in caves, the Woman lived in a neat little cave on the banks of the Deep Dark Dubious Dumbrella River. With her lived the Cat, the Golden-Eyed Yellow Cat, who drank goat's milk and ate the fish that the Woman caught in the River. And they lived happily together in the Cave, Oh Best Beloved, until the day when the Woman, combing her hair with a comb made of porcupine's quills, came upon three hairs that were gray. She pulled them out, and until sundown she sat in the door of the cave and gazed at the River. And the Yellow Cat watched silently from her great Golden Eyes. *She* knew.

Then the Woman said, "Oh Cat, did you see those Three Gray Hairs that were on my comb this morning?"

"Oh, no," said the Cat, "that is not possible, Oh Woman, for you are still Young and Beautiful."

For this was a Sapient Cat, and she knew where to look for her Fish.

"Nevertheless," said the Woman, "It is True." And she gazed again at the River, while the Cat wiped her Mouth gracefully with her Yellow Paws, and said nothing.

"I think, Oh Cat," said the Woman at last, "That it is Time for me to Settle Down."

"Now," thought the Cat, "She is surely Approaching the Age of Indiscretion." But outwardly she only kneaded her paws into the soft moss at the cave door, and looked interested.

"It is High Time," continued the Woman, "that I should Raise a Family to Support me in my Old Age."

"Oh Woman," said the Cat, "That is Easier Said than Done."

"No doubt you are right," said the Woman. "But I have Plans."

So the next morning the Woman scratched a Note on a piece of Bark and tied it to the Cat's Neck, and the Cat swam gracefully across the River to the Cave where dwelt the Man, with his Friend the Dog. For the Man and the Woman had their Caves on Opposite Sides of the Deep Dark Dumbrella River, and that is why, Oh Best Beloved, they look at things from Opposite Sides to this Very Day.

And at Sunset the Woman sat at the door of her neat little cave, dressed in her best leopard-skin, combing her hair and watch-

ing the man and the dog come slowly across the River on a Raft.

Now the Man was Very Handsome Indeed, and as he approached the door of the Cave the Woman said to herself, "Why didn't I invite him before?"

To the Man she said, "Oh Man, you will have to leave your Dog outside. For I have a Cat, as you know."

So the Man entered the Cave, but his Companion, being a Wise Old Dog and a Gentleman, remained beneath a Juniper Tree on the Bank of the River.

At first the Man was Bashful; so the Woman took him about the Cave and began to show him her Treasures. She told him of her friends, the Crocodile and the Panther and the Ostrich, and told him also of her skill in swimming and hunting. The Man bowed politely and yawned, and said he might have to excuse himself early, as he had to go Home to fix a trap.

Whereupon the Cat scratched lightly at the Woman's Ankles. "Oh Woman," she purred softly, "If you are wise, ask him to tell you All About Himself."

And so the Woman asked the Man to tell her All About Himself, and he stopped yawning almost immediately, oh Best-Beloved. She asked him to tell her about the pictures he was making on the walls of his cave, and he talked until the stars were very bright; and then she asked him if he could teach his Dog any Tricks, and he talked until the moon went down; and then she asked him about the Fish he caught last Sunday, and he talked until the Gray Light was Creeping into the Sky.

As the Man paddled back across the Deep Dark River in the Gray Dawn, the Dog lay upon the Raft with his Nose between his Paws. "Alas," said the Dog to Himself, "the Woman is Wiser than I Thought."

The next evening before Sundown the Woman built a Fire in front of the Cave and hung above it a Kettle of Water. She looked carefully through her recipes scratched on the wall, and threw into the kettle Two Fine Turtles, Several Handful of Herbs and Spices, and Various Other Things. Then she and the Cat sat in the doorway of the Cave and Fanned the Vapors that arose from the Kettle so that they floated across the River and into the Cave where sat the Man and the Dog wondering What Under the Sun they would have for supper.

When the Woman heard the Klip Klop of the paddles coming nearer, she smiled in a Superior Way at the Cat.

And the Cat blinked her Golden Eyes and said to herself, "That is all very well, but she will never get the Ring without my help." For she was a Sapient Cat and she knew that the Woman

would never be Satisfied until she got the Ring. This, Oh Best Beloved, was the ring which the Woman wanted for the Third Finger of her Left Hand. For when worn in that way it is Magic, and as long as she keeps it the Woman has power to take possession of the Man's Cave and to go through the Pockets in his Tiger Skin, and to tell him Where to Get Off Generally. And that is very Powerful Magic.

This evening when the Man approached the Cave Door, the Woman met him and offered him a cup of leaves filled with the Juice of Juniper Berries. Then the Man became Very Jolly and ate three dishes of Soup and told many Stories, both Long and Tall, while the Dog waited mournfully beneath the Tree. But while the Moon was still High, the Man left the Woman's Cave. And the Ring was still in the Hip Pocket of his Tiger Skin.

That night the Woman slept restlessly upon her bed of Branches. This was partly from the Turtle Soup, oh best-beloved, and partly from disappointment. Because she had tried flattery and food, and thereby had arrived at Her Wit's End, which was not a Very Long Journey anyhow.

So in the morning while she was sweeping out the Cave, and the Cat sat on the threshold washing her face, the Woman said: "Oh Cat, you know what is On My Mind. I will not Rest until I have the Magic Ring on my Hand. I have tried both Food and Flattery, and now I am getting an Inferiority Complex. Stir up your Sagacity, Oh Cat, and tell me What To Do."

Then the Cat spoke profoundly from the Depths of her Wisdom. "Oh Woman," she said, "Thus far you have Done Well. Food is good, and Flattery is good, but neither will Suffice. Make the Man want to Protect you and the Ring is Yours."

"What could he Protect me from?" said the Woman blankly.

"Oh, use your Head," replied the Cat, and went on washing her Face with her Yellow Paws.

So when Sundown came, the Woman dipped her comb in Water and Pushed a Wave into her Hair. She took from a Shelf in the Cave a piece of Ambergris and rubbed it behind her ear. She mixed the Pomegranate Juice with Lacquer and spread it on her Fingernails. And she left the Juniper Juice in the Back of the Cave. "For it is I, Oh Cat," she said firmly, "who will do the Story Telling Tonight."

Just as the Moon rose above the High Wild Jungle, the Man approached the Door of the Cave.

"Bring your dog with you," called the Woman Sweetly. "I like Dogs. Nice Doggie!"

"Now, now," said the Cat to Herself, "I trust this will not Go Too Far."

So the Dog lay down, a little uncomfortably, beside the man, and listened to the talking.

First the Woman told the Man how Afraid she was to Live Alone in the Cave, and how the Sounds of the Jungle Frightened her at night.

"Oh Man," she said, "I suppose you are never frightened, a great strong Man Like You!"

And then the Woman told him about the Hippopotamus who had Chased her out of her Bathing Pool, and the murderous tiger, and the Crocodile who kept her awake at night with his Snoring.

"They know, Oh Man," she said, "that I am just a poor lonely Woman, and they think they can Get By With It. How wonderful it must be to be a big strong man like You, and able to Protect Oneself!"

"This is Too Much For Me," said the Dog, for he Knew that the Tiger had often sat Pleasantly by the Woman's Fire on Cool Evenings, and that the Hippopotamus had Taught Her to Swim, and as for Snoring, the Man could Snore Louder than the Crocodile any night in the Week. So the Dog slipped out quite unnoticed and lay down under the Juniper Tree.

But the Cat laughed and purred and kneaded her Claws into the Soft Moss. "Now," said the Cat, listening attentively, "she is really getting good!" And feeling that her Work was done, she went out hunting into the Jungle.

And the Dog lay under the Juniper Tree and Listened. First there would come to his Drooping Ears murmurous voices from the Cave, then silence, then murmurs and again silence. And this lasted long after the Moon Went Down.

In the Early Dawn, Oh Best Beloved, the man and the dog paddled back across the River.

"Oh Dog," said the man, "I am the Happiest Man in the World! Today the Woman and the Cat will move into our Cave. She has Accepted my Ring!"

"Oh yeah?" said the Dog to Himself. But being a Wise Old Dog, he started counting up his Buried Bones, and being a Gentleman he did not Tell the Man that the Woman had Lied about her Friends the Animals. He kept his Nose between his Paws and gazed down into the Deep Dark Dubious Depths of the Dumbrella River.

And that, Oh Best Beloved, is the Story of How the Woman Got her Ring. And in it there is Truth as well as Fiction.

—Ann Shelley, '35.