

The Horses of Horse Isle were here when we came, they say. They'll be here once we're gone, too, no doubt. The Esrohs most of all; they were here before normal horses and all the people, and will outlast us all. How do they do it? That's a good question. Even the oldest, strongest friendships can go stale after a while. But Aphrodite ... she found a way to make friendships stick. She found a way to keep the Esroh Clan together all those years, all those eons.

It happened like this, they say. One year, long ago, the Esroh Clan was feeding together on Line isle when a great storm arose! That storm was so huge, and so fierce, that it spawned several tornadoes. Now, you know how tornadoes are; one spot of land they rip to shreds, and pull up every plant, leaf, root and all, but another spot of land, maybe only a few meters away, is untouched and perfect. Well, that's what happened to Line isle. The big forest on the northwest end of the isle was cut in two, and the rest of the island was split up into little spots of lush grass surrounded by a network of bare rock and sand and dirt. There wasn't a spot big enough for the whole herd to graze together, not between the hail from the storm, and the tornadoes, and the waves which came right up on the beach and onto the grassland. So, the herd was forced to split up into smaller groups. A couple of the stallions even went off by themselves, just to find enough to eat until the sea became calm enough that they could move to another isle.

This seemed to work well. Everybody had enough to eat, and no one had much to complain about. Then, a funny thing happened. As time went by, the ground which had been damaged began to regrow grass. Clover and wildflowers came up as well. And after a while, even though one could still see where the damage had been done, there was no longer any reason for the herd members to live apart.

So did they go back to living as one great herd? No they did not! You see, by now, they had all gotten used to being apart in little groups. As smart as they are, the Esrohs are still horses. You know how horses get when they make fast friends and are separated from them, or when a group that's been together for a long time is suddenly asked to take on a stranger. They get very defensive of their territory and their friends. And soon there were fights at the edges of the old grazing plots. "This is my grass," one would say. "Your grass is over there!" the other would declaim. Soon there were six little cliques, grabbing a bite to eat here and there while they glared at each other across what used to be a barren patch of land.

After a while, they spent so much time glaring at each other that they didn't really take enough time to rest, eat, or drink. When they did find a very lush patch on their own territory, they ate it all quickly, so that no one else would get it. And of course, that meant that there wasn't any more for them, either. The Esrohs' beautiful, silky black coats started to frizz, and their manes became knotted and tangled and full of spiders. This made them so uncomfortable that they only ate greedily and threatened each other all the more.

Soon, even though they were living on a beautiful island that could support them all easily, and whereupon they could live in perfect peace, they had made the ground barren in their attempts to further the interests of their own particular cliques. And this is when Aphrodite got her idea. Aphrodite knew that the Clan needed to be together, so that everyone could relax and enjoy what the isles had to offer. She had to find a way to make the Esrohs appreciate one another again. Then, one day, she was being very bothered by a flock of starlings who were nesting in nearby trees, making grating noises, and darting in her path. This gave her an idea. So she went to the bird, all the birds of that island, and called them together for a council. This was her plan: whenever the Esrohs were at peace, eating

quietly and enjoying each other's company, they birds would sing sweetly, and show off their beautiful colours. But whenever one Esroh threatened another, or tried to keep some resource to itself, all the birds were to swoop down near that clan member, making loud, raucous noises, and scraping with their talons, and dropping acorns, pine-cones, and other items from the air just to make that particular Esroh even more miserable.

Aphrodite told the birds to say nothing to the other Esrohs, and, in fact, not to speak to them at all. She herself said nothing to anyone else about her plan. After that time, whenever any Esroh reared, or stomped, or snorted, or kicked, or bit, the birds of Line isle would find some excuse to bicker and argue right near them. The only thing that would stop the birds was for the Esroh to simply walk away toward another Esroh they would not have otherwise approached. Then the birds would turn their attention to something else, and once all was quiet, they would continue their beautiful song.

Day by day, without the other Esrohs realizing what was going on, they got closer and closer to one another, until once again, they were one herd. Once back together, they rested more easily. They moved together, peacefully, and without tearing up the ground under their hooves. In this way, once again, the grass grew lush and there was plenty for all.

Some months later, when they had gone on to another Isle, Aphrodite told the other Esrohs what she had done, they say. Some Esrohs were certain that they had simply remade old friendships on their own. Other Esrohs refused to believe her, for they didn't understand how she could use the birds to train them in such a way. But she did. And this is the way we train wild horses to this day. We do not discomfit them much, but we make sure that they are most comfortable when they are with us. And in this way, they become our friends. This is the lesson horses and people have learned from Aphrodite ... or so they say.