

*Meeting the Gardener*

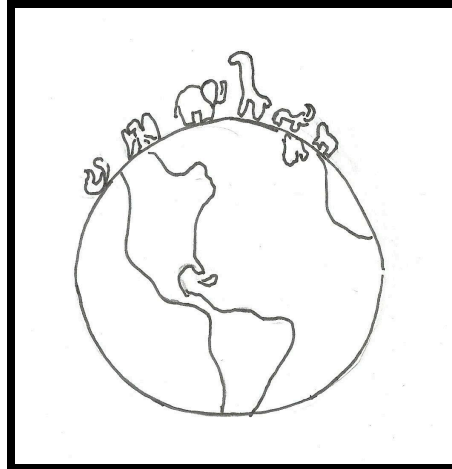
Ford walks through a forest, across a field and over a creek. He pushes his way past brush and around more trees. Ford counts his steps as a way to distract himself from worrying as he walks. It also helps Ford to concentrate on where he is going.

Ford wends his way along paths and deer trails. He sees flowers, broad leaves, and ripening berries and other fruit. Vines twist around fallen logs and create dense patches of ground cover. Wild animals are curious and look up as Ford passes by. Although the woods are somewhat dark and mysterious Ford begins to feel the cheerful uplifting power of green plants. Green is a color of life, health and well-being.

Finally, Ford is relieved to see the gardener ahead. The Gardener is a wrinkled old man, moving slowly but with steady hands as he tends to the plants in his garden. He is wearing well-worn clothes made of brown and tan colors with long pants. His face is hidden by shade but a patch of white hair sticks out beneath a cap.

Ford and the Gardener smile as they greet each other. "Welcome, young friend. How are you?" says the Gardener. Ford says, "I'm not doing great, sorry to say. The Lady of the Woods said I should speak with you. She said you will know what to do." The Gardener says, "Oh, so you've met her. You are fortunate. She does not appear to everyone. Please tell me what's wrong."

Ford tells the Gardener his story of many insect problems. The Gardener listens to Ford and then says, "The Lady of the Woods is wise and she did what she can to help you. There is more you can do, but you will have to be brave and face your fears head on."



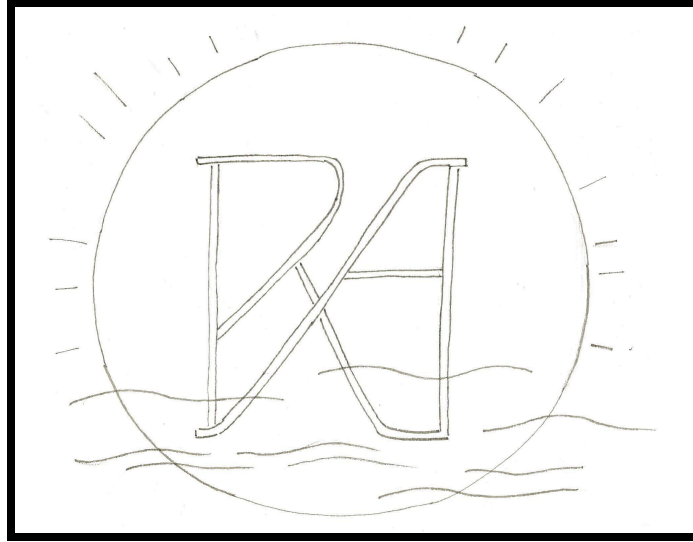
*Advice from the Gardener*

The Gardener explains, "I agree that insects are troubling. They attack in places where you can't see or feel them until it's too late. Insects crawl up and down on our bodies, biting and invading every nook and cranny."

Ford agrees. "That's right. Being eaten by insects is horrible, especially when they are sneaky about it. They have no cause to go on harming me. I wish them all dead and gone."

The Gardener says, "Be cautious about wishing for such an extreme event. People are part of the world but we did not make the world. We change it like we own it but is the whole world really ours to use as we please? Unless you're sure, we need to respect the planet and all its forms of life. We are the kind of life which matters most to us, but we share this planet with many other life forms as well. It is their home too."

The Gardener continues, "Insects serve a purpose, even if we don't see it easily. Many animals depend on insects for their food. Without insects as food many animals would suffer, and then in turn even more animals would be affected. Frogs need to catch flies, and foxes eat frogs. Remember, the earth belongs to all living creatures, and we belong to the earth. A gardener seeks to find a balance where humans, animals, and the natural world live in harmony. We cannot remove insects from the world without upsetting the balance."



*RA and the Crystal Prism*

“There is a secret method you can use to solve your problems with insects. I can share it with you, but it will only work if you are brave and face your fears.” Ford nods his head.

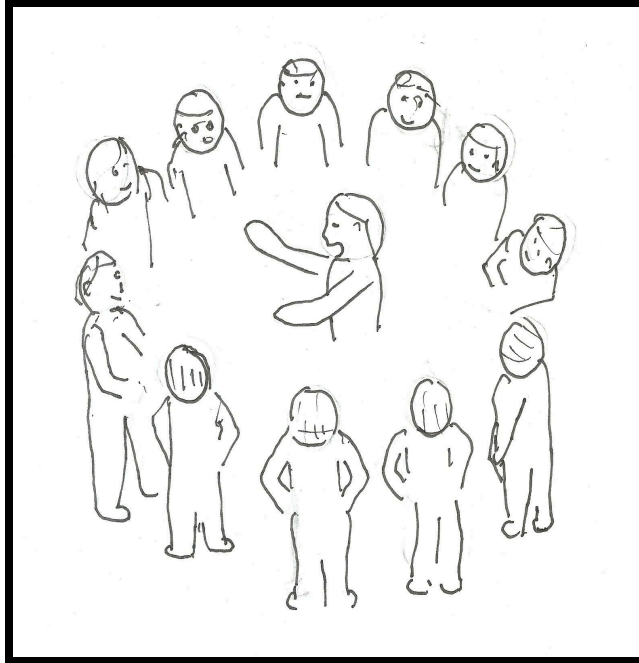
“Did you know that insects can be hypnotized? A scientist discovered this long ago while studying how insects are attracted to light. You have probably seen insects gather around outdoor lights at night. Actually, insects are fascinated by light at all times of day and the amount and color of light affect them greatly.”

“If you break a beam of light into separate colors you can see how this works. A tool called a prism splits light into the seven colors of a rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. Insects are stunned by a kaleidoscope of colors and they lose control of their senses.”

“When you visit a nest, take a crystal prism with you. Then add a strand of your golden hair to the prism; this will turn a rainbow into the mystical Seven Rays. When the Seven Rays appear, shout ‘Ra!’ three times. Insects recognize this as the name of the sun which the Egyptians gave it millennia ago.”

“When insects are hypnotized by the Seven Rays and under the spell of Ra, then you can give commands to insects like their sun god. They will obey simple, easy to understand instructions like, ‘Do not come near humans.’”

The gardener says, “Your best opportunity to use a prism is at dawn when the sun rises. You will need to visit as many insect nests as possible to reach the leaders or queens of each kind of insect. Insects in a nest all share a group mind. If you reach the queens and nest leaders, the new rules they learn will spread quickly to all of their kind.”



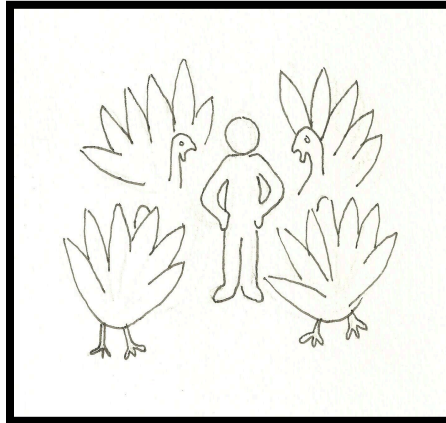
*A Team Takes Shape*

Ford realizes he must visit many insect nests to tame all the types which are harmful. He thinks, "Hmm, this job is too big for me alone. I need help." Then he suddenly has an idea. "I know what I can do! I'll contact my Cub Scout Troop! They are a strong and helpful group of friends." Ford realizes if the work is divided up among many people then it can be done faster and more efficiently. A pack of Cub Scouts can be in many different places at once, all ready to approach a different nest or insect colony at dawn.

Ford gathers his Cub Scout troop together to explain what he has learned from the Gardener. He invites each scout to participate, and the scouts agree with enthusiasm. No more insect bites is a powerful reason to help. They talk about the words in the messages they will deliver to bugs. One idea is, "Act as if humans are invisible." Another is "Pretend humans don't exist." There are lots of ways to say, "Stay away from us."

Everyone starts practicing how they will deliver their message when talking to bugs. Being prepared is the Boy Scout way. Wesley says, "If I tell insects to leave people alone, will I earn an insect badge?"

Ford says, "Yes, we all probably will. Ok. We need to each pick a different insect type so we convince as many as possible to leave us alone. Let's brainstorm our least favorite insects and divide them up. There are so many kinds that we can only pick the most important ones and assign someone to go to each. We'll each have our own mission. Now, who knows which insects cause us the greatest trouble? Let's focus on those." The troop begins to brainstorm a list.



### **Assigning Scouts to Insects and Animal Companions**

Just as the scouts begin to make a list of assignments the Lady of the Woods returns with her animal friends. She says, “We heard from the Gardener what you’re attempting and we have come to help. It will not be easy to enter each nest. You may be attacked and our animal friends can defend you until you reach the center of the nests and bring out the prisms.”

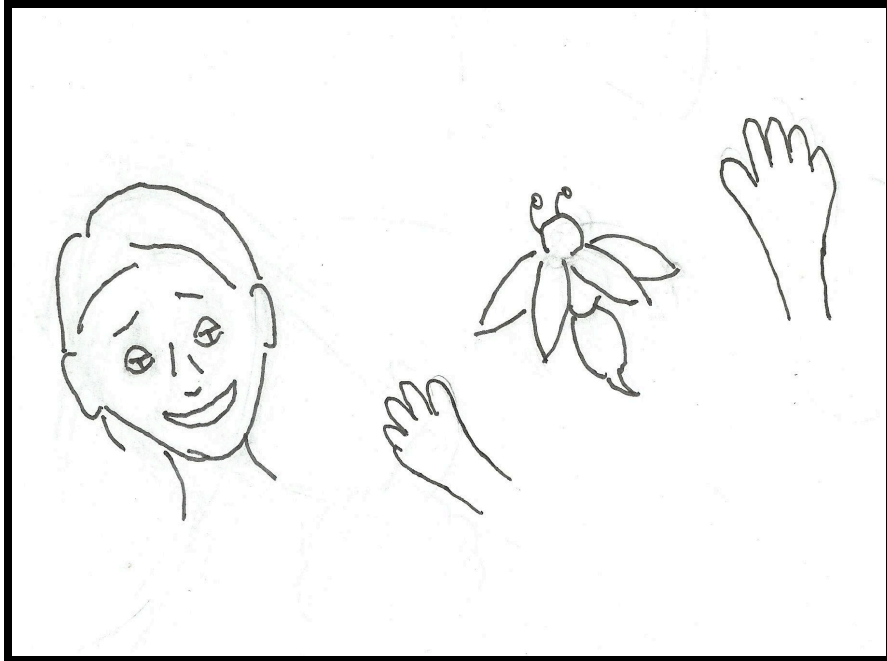
Ford says, “Wonderful! Welcome and thank you. We’ll be glad to have your help. We’re more likely to succeed with you on our side.” Ford makes introductions and then the planning proceeds.

Cash speaks up and says, “Let’s send Elliot R in to deal with the ticks. Elliot R is fearless and fierce. He can bulldoze his way in. Plus he has a grudge against ticks. He is so meaty and delicious that ticks start drooling as soon as they see him.”

Elliot R says, “Meaty? Really? I agree that I should be the one to take on the ticks though. I’d like to crack them open like peanuts at the ballpark and leave them broken and scattered on the ground.”

Elliot R continues, “Ever since I went camping it’s been personal between me and ticks. I fed so many they were round and full when they came off me. Their legs couldn’t even touch the ground. They just rolled around until I stomped on them. They popped like water balloons except they were filled with blood instead of water.” Elliot R continues, “I was sore for weeks, and there was a huge red mess which I had to clean up. So, yeah, It’s personal. I’m carrying a major grudge and I’m ready for payback.”

The Lady of the Woods says, “Elliot R, opossums and wild turkeys will be your guides and bodyguards.” One opossum climbs up onto Elliot R’s shoulder to ride there. The opossum says, “Ticks are delicious and they’re slow. I can’t wait to chow down.” Elliot R says, “We’re going in strong. It’s time for a showdown with the ticks!”



### **Cooper Slaps**

Cooper volunteers next. "I'm willing to take on the mosquitoes as long as I have backup. I think I can take them. I slap really hard and fast."

The Lady of the Woods says, "Cooper, the bats can go with you. They will be your guides and bodyguards. You'll have a whole flock of bats to escort you. They are usually a night team that do stealth work but they can also do amazing maneuvers in the light."

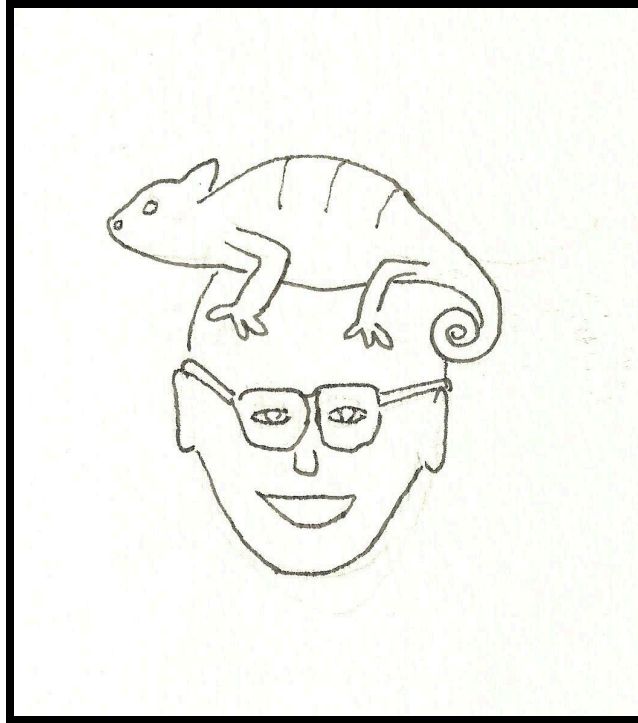
Cooper says, "Wow! That sounds great! Thank you."

Cash says, "That sounds cool. You should probably wear a Batman costume. Or maybe you can be Robin."

Cooper stares at Cash, trying to decide if he's being helpful or not. The Lady of the Woods says, "Yes, of course. Dress in dark clothes and you'll fit right in. The bats will like it."

Bats circle and swirl above Cooper as they are mentioned. The bats say, "We'll be like your secret service agents. We'll do surveillance and 'take a bullet' for you by intercepting mosquitoes. In a costume you will be perfect as bat leader."

Cooper finally decides what to say back to Cash. Cooper says, "I have an idea for you, Cash. You can follow us and pick up all the bat droppings to sell as fertilizer. Bat poop or guano is valuable to farmers. You could make some easy money, Cash."



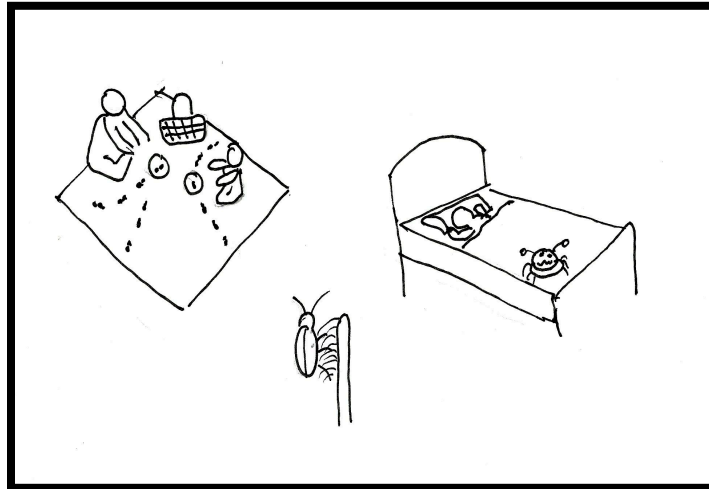
### **Hair Like a Chameleon**

Fletcher is next. "I know," he says. Head lice! My mom hates them. I'll go after the lice in her honor. I can dye my hair any color and completely fool the lice. Let me know what you think will work and I'll switch to that color. I'm like a chameleon."

So Fletcher is in charge of meeting with the head lice. He's taking a big risk. It could be goodbye and farewell to his head of hair no matter what color it is.

"Who is my companion?" says Fletcher eagerly. His eyes are wide and hopeful. The Lady of the Woods says, " We'll send crows and starlings from the bird family. Lice are very small and not nutritious, but these birds have good eyesight and are skilled at pecking. They can easily pick up lice and remove them from hair and skin and anywhere else."

"I like it," says Fletcher. "I can be a crow. I'll do black hair and comb it in a triangle for the beak."



*Bug Worries*

Caleb says, "I'll take ants. My mother loves picnics in the park. We spread out a blanket and enjoy our food outdoors in nice weather. The only problem is that ants think they're invited and pretty soon they're all over our blanket and food. Yuck. I don't eat ants."

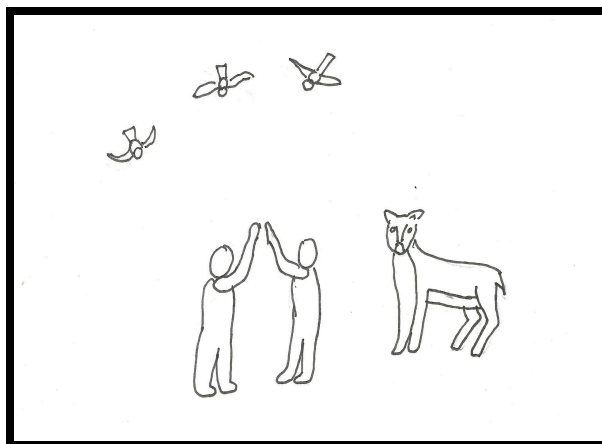
Caleb says, "Lady of the Woods, do you have any anteater friends?"

The Lady of the Woods explains that nearby anteaters may only be found at the zoo and can't be set loose for this work. She says, "The finches and wrens will be glad to help you."

After ticks, mosquitoes, and lice come chiggers and bedbugs. These small biting insects are almost too small to be seen. Wesley chooses bedbugs. He says, "My mom worries about bedbugs on every vacation. She often checks a bedbug registry like some people check the weather. My mom will be so happy if bedbugs are taken off her worry list."

Ryder says, "I'll take on the cockroaches. My mom is grossed out when she sees them. We saw some in a restaurant once and she made us leave and find a different place to eat. Also she says they like to snack on toothbrushes so we keep ours in a drawer instead of by the sink." Everyone agrees with Ryder that is disgusting so part of the commands to cockroaches will be to stay off our toothbrushes.

The Lady of the Woods says, "Some bugs eat each other. Cockroaches can help you with the bedbugs if you train them to seek and find bedbugs as part of their mission. They can be bedbug assassins. Meanwhile, Wesley will have a team of lizards and Ryder will have many mice to accompany him. Good luck to these three humans and their animal companions and bodyguards."



*High Five to Bugs are going down!*

Next Cash speaks up again. Everyone is expecting him to say which bug he will take but instead he says, "Maybe Hayes can tell the ladybugs to back off." Cash giggles at his own joke. Hayes responds, "Actually I'll take the termites that eat our homes." Then Hayes turns to face Cash. He says, "I dare you to take chiggers since you know so much about being a pest." Cash says, "Ok, I will take the chiggers. I'm not afraid of insects, just clowns." They high five each other and say, "Two more bugs, going down. Oh yeah."

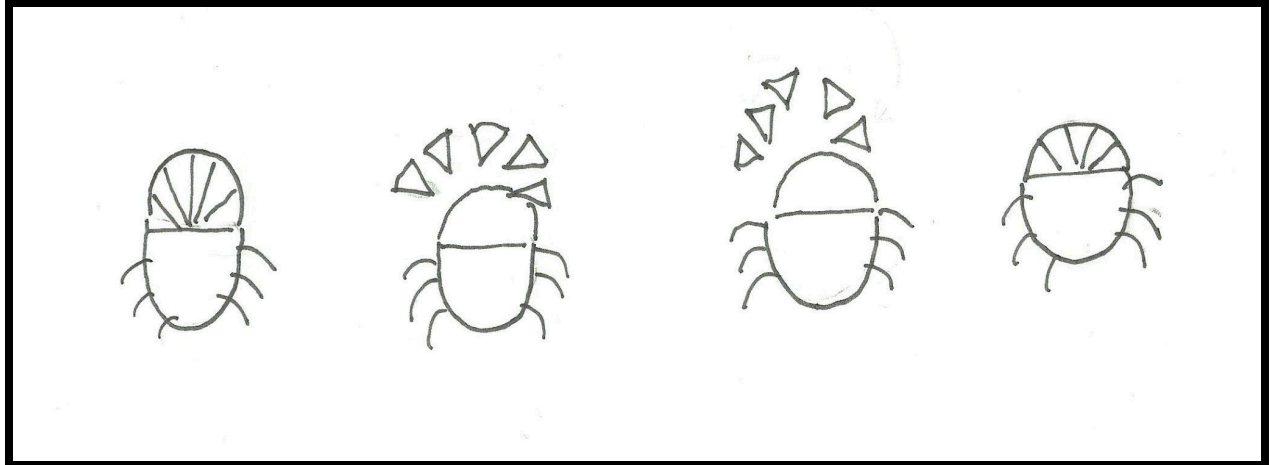
Dhruv agrees to talk with the flies that hover around us. Dhruv says, "I don't like flies buzzing in front of a tv screen, a computer, or an ipad. Flies are annoying, almost as bad as commercials. It's even worse when they land on your food because they spread germs."

Ford says, "I'm not sure what's left but I can take the stink bugs. They're like skunks of the insect kingdom and they keep getting in my house."

Dhwani says, "What insect should I take? I want to help too." The Lady of the Woods says, "Dhwani, will you take the butterflies, please? Dhruv says, "Why? butterflies are harmless to humans." The Lady of the Woods says, "Dhwani will understand when the time is right. She is aware of something you are not."

The Lady of the Woods continues, "All of you will have birds as your companions including sparrows, bluebirds, and wrens. These are in addition to other animals which specialize in eating your kind of insect. Together they will all do their best to safeguard you."

"Thank you," says Ford. "We're glad to have you all with us." Birds flutter in large groups to trees near their humans. There is a reorganization of creatures and partnerships form. Now that all pairings of scouts and animals are made, the scouts rehearse with the prisms one more time. They all chant, "Ra! Ra! Ra!" together. Then everyone goes home and tries to fall asleep early so they are fresh and ready in the morning.

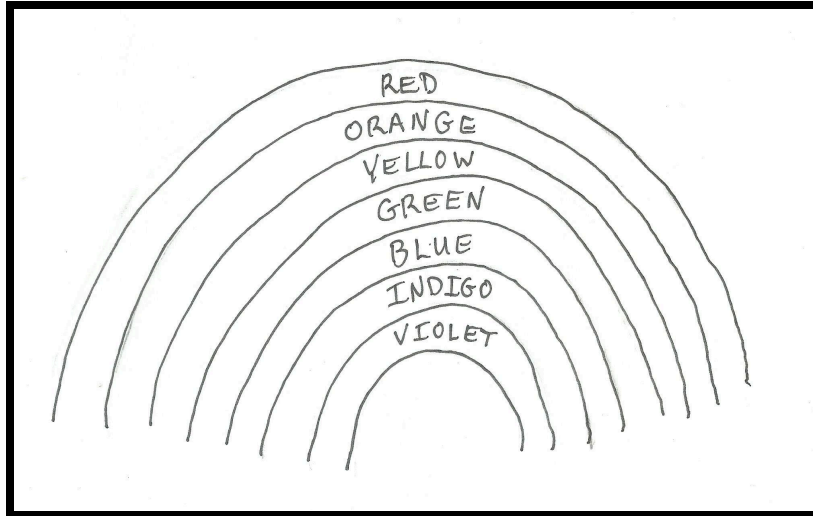


*Nest visit mission: Rearrange the minds of bugs*

Early the next morning scouts and animals meet while it's still dark outside. Every scout checks their gear bag for a prism and a newly plucked golden hair. As scouts put their prisms and golden hair back in pouches, Ford says, "Don't lose the hair. Giving new commands to the bugs may not work without it and I won't be around to resupply you. Plus, if I have to keep plucking I might go bald."

Then they put all hands together in a circle. Scouts call out, "Ready, Set, Go!" and throw their hands up into the air as they cheer. Then the scouts separate and birds and animals follow each scout. The scouts travel quietly to the entrance of each kind of insect nest. Some scouts whisper a little prayer. "I'm going into the nest. Please let me come out alive and unharmed!" The birds and animals wonder but do not ask, "Who are you speaking to?"

Some nests are on the ground, and others are in the branches of trees. Some are under rocks which can be turned over, and some are inside rotten logs that need to be broken open to reveal the nest. These are moist and messy. The nests are either impressive or disgusting depending on your point of view. For an insect these may seem like great cavernous spaces but for our scouts they are more like dank, ugly holes.

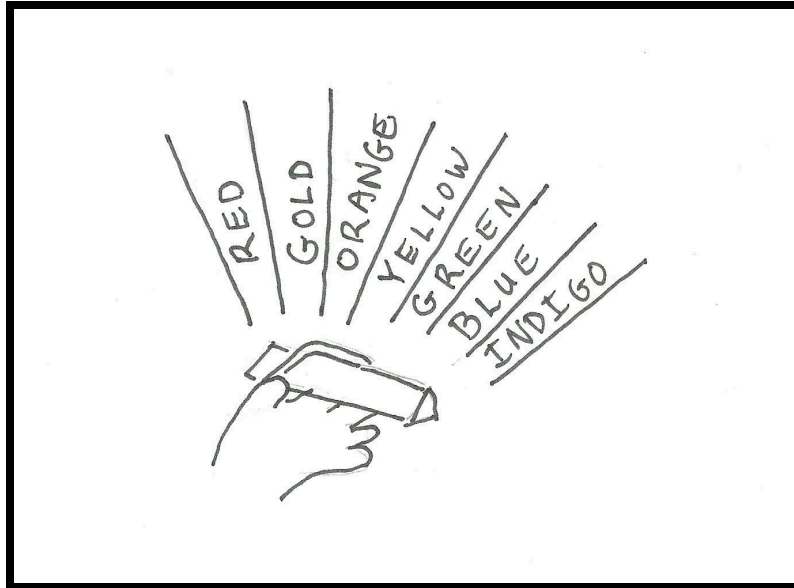


*The colors of a rainbow*

As Ford waits at the entrance to the kingdom of the stinkbugs he recalls the instructions from the Gardener on how to use the power of the prism. A prism breaks white light up into the same bands of color as a rainbow. Adding a thin strand of gold adds gold light to the ordinary colors of the rainbow. When gold is in second place, then bugs can be given new commands to rule them. The new colors of the prism become The Seven Rays: *red, gold, orange, yellow, green, blue, and indigo*. The color of gold turns an already magical rainbow into the powerful Seven Rays.

Ford carries his prism in a small bag tied to his wrist. He twists the string around his fingers to hold the bag even more securely and ready for use. He twists and untwists nervously. Ford can feel the shape of the prism, hard and triangular in the velvet bag. He carries it carefully as if guarding a treasure.

The sky begins to lighten, which makes the horizon dividing earth and sky begin to appear. Scouts are standing ready at each nest entrance as the first rays of the new rising sun break across the horizon. As the sun lifts its weary head, there is a yellow burst of color and dawn breaks. Ford says, "Now is the time for action! I wish all my brave scout friends good luck!"



Light + Prism + Gold = Seven Rays

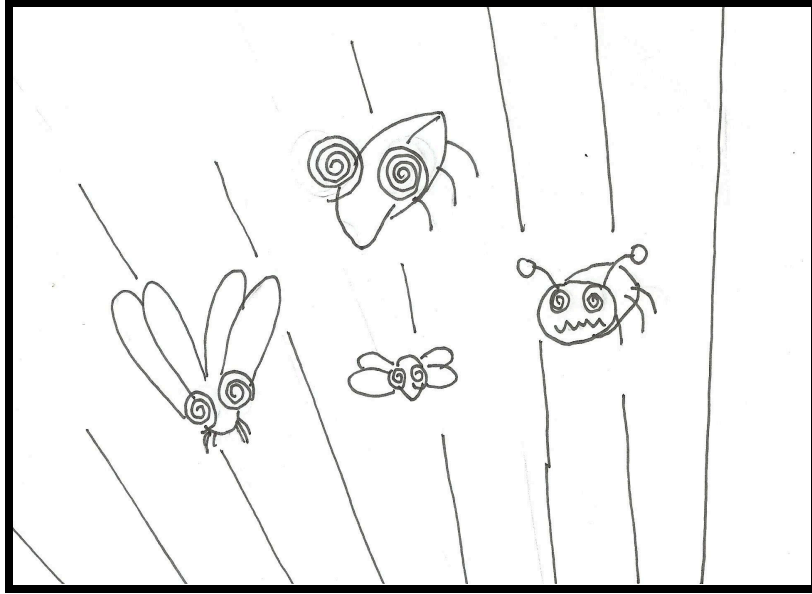
Insects make clever winding tunnels to reach the center of their nest where the insects think they are safest. Ford needs to crack open the stinkbug nest to get to the center. "I'm going in," Ford says to a group of bluebirds as he pokes a stick and digs into the nest, starting the invasion. Ford knows he could take a full blast of the worst smelling insect juice on the planet.

When he pokes in the stick there is an alarming amount of frantic activity in the hive. Many insects try to attack the giant named Ford. Animal companions begin gobbling. Quick-beaked birds protect him time and again.

As he reaches the center of the nest Ford lifts a prism above his head like a sword, his own Excalibur. As light passes through the prism he wraps a golden hair around the prism to transform a rainbow with gold. Behold! The Seven Rays appear!

With the light-filled prism held high above him Ford shouts, "Ra! Ra! Ra!" The light show is fantastic and overwhelming. It's like the heavens are open and a choir is singing the sweetest music. Sound and light combine until a sunburst finish shatters the horizon and all the insects are frozen in place.

The single mind of the stinkbug colony is captured in a hypnotic trance. The bugs can no longer move or think on their own. Ford is in command.

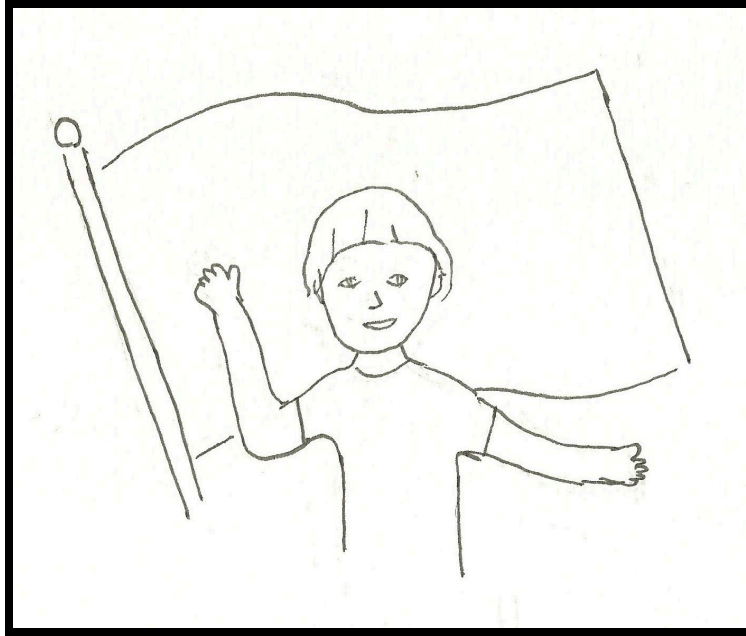


*Hypnosis and Commanding the Insects*

While the Seven Rays shine, the thoughts of insects become apparent to Ford. Ford's mind is connected to all of their minds at once. There are so many insect minds and yet they are all one.

They are mostly thinking about what to eat next and where to find more food. They are hungry, always hungry, on the lookout and searching for food. Move here. Fly there. Crawl there. Food will be in one of these places.

With the power of his mind Ford can communicate and converse with the insects in language, words, and ideas that are understandable to him and to insects. In this moment they speak and think the same language and their minds are one. The will power of Ford is greater than theirs. With the assistance of the prism light he begins to bend the way the insects think and shapes their goals and desires.



*Respect the flag of Ford*

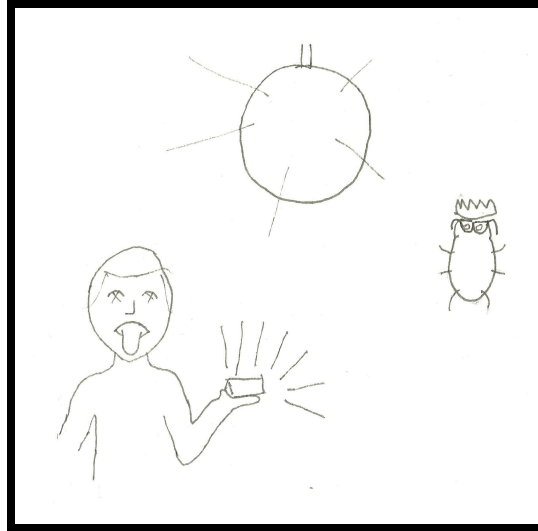
He speaks to the insects and commands them to leave him alone. He puts the idea into their heads that he is the worst tasting substance on earth. Just sniffing him will cause insects to fall ill and die. While this is not quite true, it is a simple way for insects to understand that he is off limits and forbidden to them.

He introduces the Flag of Ford to remind them of his territory and his right to be ignored. “You see this hair on my head?! This is the Flag of Ford! When you see this hair, that’s a reminder of our new understanding. It’s a signal to stay off this body and away from this person. There is zero tolerance. If you touch me or bite me again there will be serious consequences. Now you will allow me to go back to my contented life.”

Ford also tells the insects to leave scouts, children and all other humans alone. “Stay away from human homes and all the places children and scouts go.” Ford tells them, “I command you to never taste human blood again!”

Then Ford is finished. He takes the prism out of the light and puts it back in a bag. This releases insects from their trance. They blink several times and slowly look around. It’s like they are waking up for the first time. They look in every direction. Some begin to fly again but none show any interest in Ford. It’s as if he is a rock or an obstacle that must be flown around but one that doesn’t hold any interest for them at all.

Ford feels a great surge of relief and a hint of pride in his success. He smiles at the bluebirds who watch him. Ford leaves the nest behind and walks determinedly back to the meeting area for all scouts.



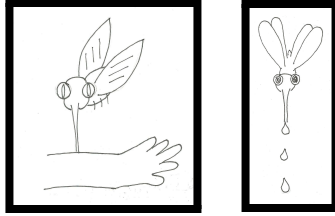
*Elliot R battles the Kind of Ticks*

Meanwhile Elliot R goes into the realm of the ticks and they immediately jump on him and weigh him down. The opossums and wild turkeys gobble as fast as they can but it's a struggle to keep up with the huge numbers of ticks. They attach themselves to Elliot R's skin all over. "No! No! No!" he says. "Humans shake hands, they don't share blood when they meet." Perhaps ticks are too dumb to negotiate, or perhaps they are clever. A tick says, "Oh, this is how we become blood brothers. What's a little blood between friends?"

Elliot R says, "I'm not your bro, and I'm not your friend! And I'm definitely not your food!" Elliot pulls out the prism and holds it up to the light. He adds a single golden hair and the seven rays appear. He yells, "Ra! Ra! Ra!" Elliot R smiles. It's working, he thinks. Then just as he prepares to give the ticks commands, the king of the ticks, who is wearing sunglasses says, "Reveal our secret weapon!" From the shadows above a mirror ball is lowered into the light. It glitters and explodes the colored light in crazy reflections. Light is scattered everywhere!

Elliot R says, "Oh, no, a mirror ball!" As the rainbow of prism light shatters into a million particles, the bugs break free of Elliot R's spell and the tables turn. The ticks begin to hypnotize Elliot R with the mirror ball. His mouth falls open, his eyes glaze over, and he begins drooling. The king of the ticks speaks to the hypnotized Elliot R to give him new commands. "You will become one of us. You are now a tick and you will fight for us. You will always be hungry for blood." Elliot R starts to look like a mindless tick.

Elliot R can feel his sense of control slipping away. He thinks, "Smash it! Smash it!" With the last of his strength and will Elliot R picks up a rock and throws it at the disco ball. The mirrorball shatters into millions of pieces of silver glass. The Seven Rays return and ticks begin to feel the hypnotic effects of the reassembled colors. The ticks stop moving altogether and Elliot R knocks off the few remaining ticks on him. Elliot R slowly pulls himself back together. "I said no and no and no!" Then Elliot delivers his version of the pledge to change the minds of all ticks.



## Mosquitoes Collect DNA Samples

At the nest of the mosquitoes Cooper connects to the minds of the mosquitoes and discovers that mosquitoes have an important secret. When they bite a human to eat the blood, they also take a drop back to their headquarters. The blood is analyzed and DNA information is stored in a database of all creatures. Since every person's DNA is unique and a match for just that individual, the identity of everyone is known to mosquitoes.

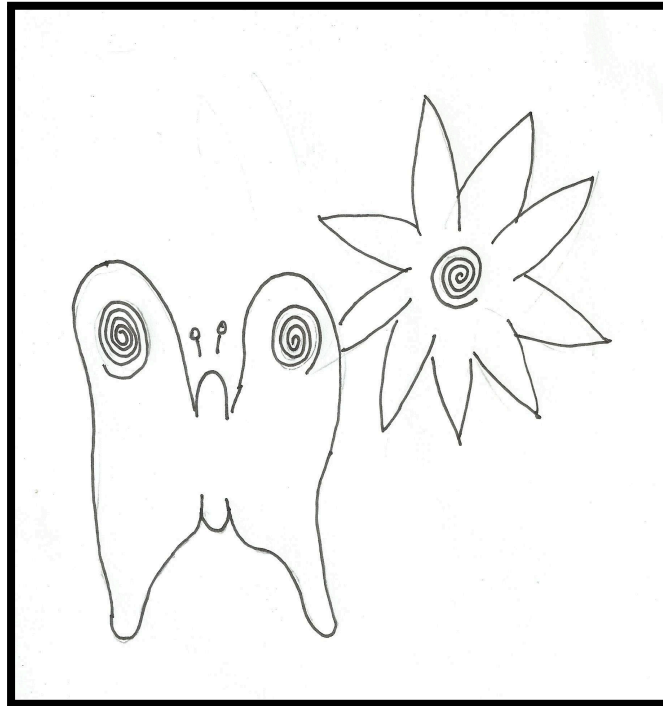
Cooper wonders, "What is done with this information? DNA is an amazing field of science but why are mosquitoes using it? Is there someone or something behind the mosquitoes keeping track of all living creatures? Is there a Wizard of Oz behind the curtain? What is this person's plan?"

Now that Cooper is in on the secret, what should he do with it? Of course, he must protect himself. Cooper might be targeted by whoever controls the mosquitoes for finding out their secret. Cooper thinks of people who could help. This is such sensitive information he worries about taking it back to the whole Cub Scout troop. It's a big and worrisome mystery, too large to solve today certainly.

Cooper says, "Mosquitoes sure are devious. Who knew they were the most accurate and comprehensive census takers on the planet? Mosquitoes keep count of each bite that they take. They have a tally and bite log of all the people they've bitten. If you've ever been bitten by a mosquito then they know about you too."

Cooper thinks of people he trusts who are smart and clever. Cooper decides that Elliot C might be just the mastermind he needs. Cooper says, "This is a conspiracy and it needs to be investigated carefully. I better contact Elliott C. He will know how to unravel it and come up with a new plan."

Will Elliot C. use the information for profit or power? Or will he use it to support and help people when they need medical care? It partly depends on whether Elliot C is a good and kind child or actually an evil genius at the start of his villainy.



### Butterflies and Flowers

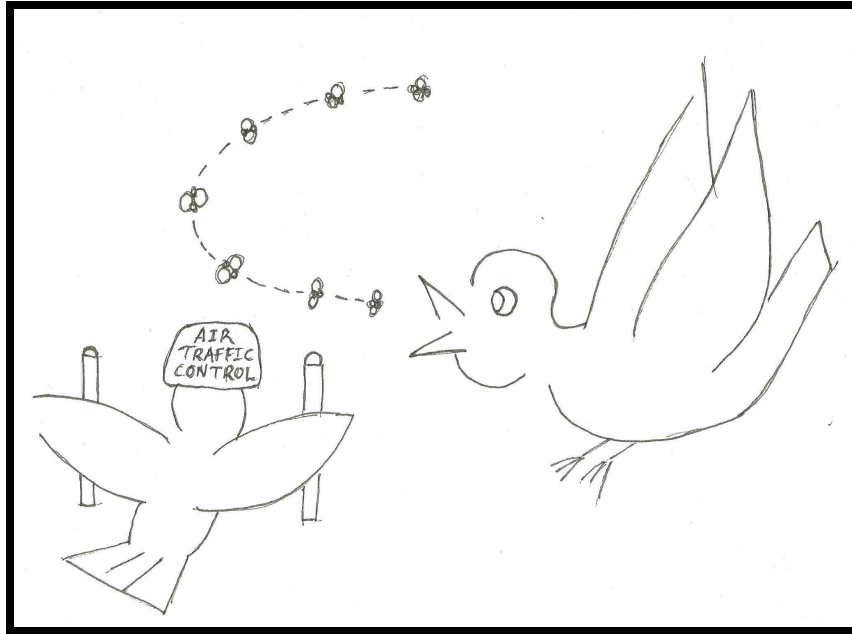
Dhwani talks with Dhruv as they follow nearby paths to visit their insects, the butterflies and the flies. Dhruv says, “Why did you agree to go to the butterflies? Butterflies aren’t a problem. They can startle you but they never really bother you.”

Dhwani says, “Yes, that is why I must visit them. They are the insects most liked by people. They hold the key to helping other insects be viewed more favorably by people.”

When Dhwani visits the butterflies, they settle in her hair and on her arms and all around. Dhwani speaks to the butterflies. “I have come to tell you that people all over the world see you as the most beautiful insect. You are as beautiful as the flowers you land on.”

“You inspire us all with your beauty. You make us feel better and less angry. Perhaps you can help us see beauty in the other kinds of insects around us.” As Dhwani is speaking the butterflies momentarily take the shape of a crown resting on her hair.

Dhwani continues, “You have such a gentle nature. As you flutter about, people do not panic or worry. They are charmed and glad to be in your presence. It’s a power we wish you would share with other insects. Perhaps, you can make all insects be appreciated more by humans.”



*Pigeon Air Traffic Control Tower*

Ford's teammates begin their march back to headquarters, each having completed or at least attempted their mission. Ford arrives first and sits in the center of the meeting area. Animals gather in a circle around him as he sits cross-legged on the ground. Ford and all birds nearby, not just the highly alert bluebirds, find a new peace and calm.

Caleb returns next. Still highly excited from his encounter, Caleb says, "When I scooped a big hole in their ant hill, ants came boiling out of the ground. There were so many and they seemed angry. I could barely believe what I was seeing. It was kind of scary but the prism worked. Those ants won't be attending any picnics soon."

Wesley arrives as Caleb is speaking. When Caleb is finished with his story, Wesley says, "I told the bedbugs they'd be more comfortable sleeping on rocks than on people's mattresses. I don't care if they all get stiff necks from no pillows."

Ryder laughs and says, "I told the cockroaches there's an all you can eat buffet at the trash dump. I hope they never get tired of it. A few squads are still feasting on bedbugs before they finish work and then go to the party at the dump."

Dhruv says, "I told the flies they are like little airplanes and that pigeons are their air traffic controllers. The pigeons are happy to tell the flies where to go and sometimes it's right through the hatch and down to the gullet!"

Hayes says, "I told the termites they are firefighters and they should eat all the dead wood in forests that might catch on fire. They have a lot of work ahead of them. The woodpeckers are herding them now."



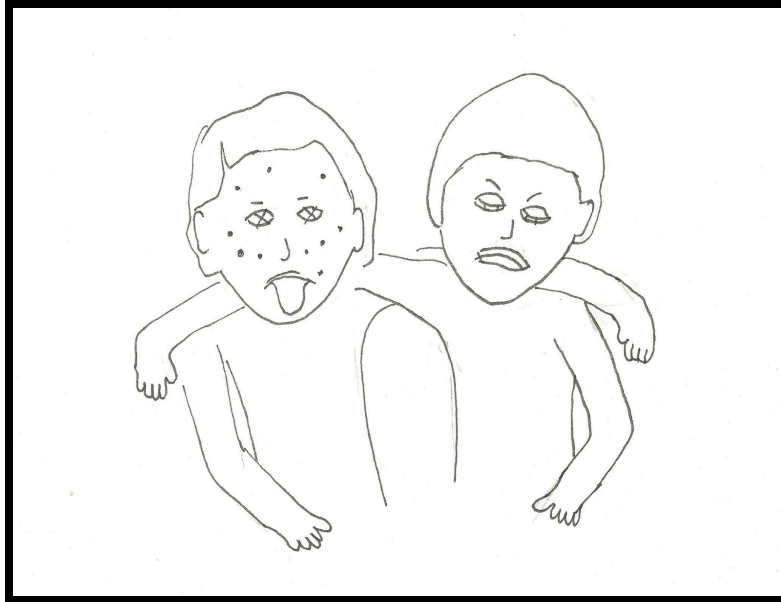
*Tricky mosquitoes*

Fletcher comes back with a shaved head. "What happened?" says Wesley. "Well, the lice loved my hair so much I gave it to them. I told them from now on they should only bother purple, blue, pink and rainbow colored hair. It's like cotton candy to them. I'll think about my next color as my hair grows back."

Dhwani says, "I asked the butterflies for their help and friendship. It may not be what you expected, but it didn't feel right to command them. I think we can trust the butterflies and we can learn something from them. More importantly, all other insects might learn to share their beauty with us." The scouts are silent as they try to feel the truth of what Dhwani is telling them.

Cooper captures everyone's attention when he says, "The mosquitoes thanked me for showing up to their blood drive. They thought I was there to make a donation of a gallon or two. They were very wrong and many learned the hard way. They were either slapped flat or smacked silly. Once they started talking I learned some things that may turn out to be useful later."

Cooper continues, "I'm not sure if I reached them all though. There are many, many clouds of mosquitoes to reach. I suggest we keep training on how to karate chop mosquitoes out of the air. I still don't trust them fully."



*Elliot tells Cash, "I'm dead"*

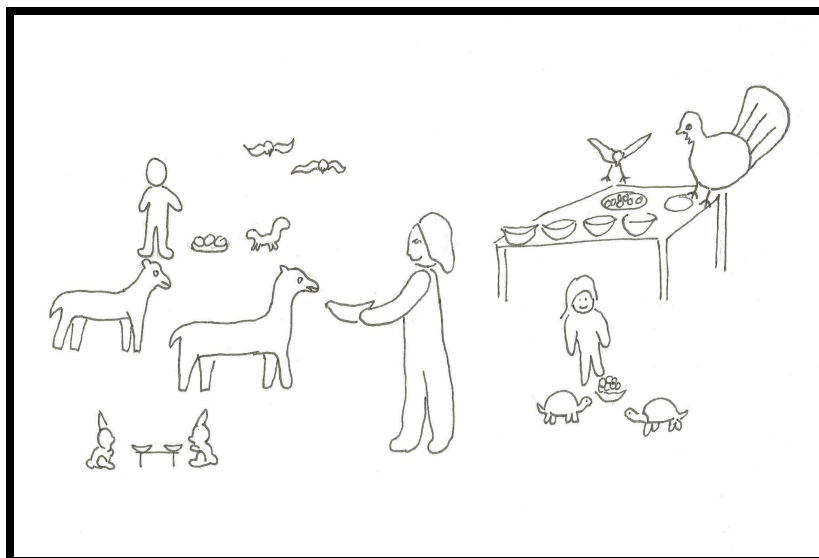
Elliot R returns from his journey covered with bite marks all over his face. Elliot R seems a little dried up and shriveled from all the missing blood that was sucked out of him.

Ryder says, "You have so many red, angry spots on your face, I thought you were a teenager. You should probably go see the nurse."

Elliot R says, "And then the counselor. I'm pretty sure I'll be having nightmares tonight."

Finally, Cash returns and says, "Nobody told me that chiggers get inside your clothes before they bite. Apparently they like soft parts of your skin that fold and wrinkle. Chiggers should be called 'underwear bugs.' Now I'm itchy in places I don't want to talk about."

"Nasty," says Hayes. "Please keep it to yourself."



*Ford's mom prepares a banquet*

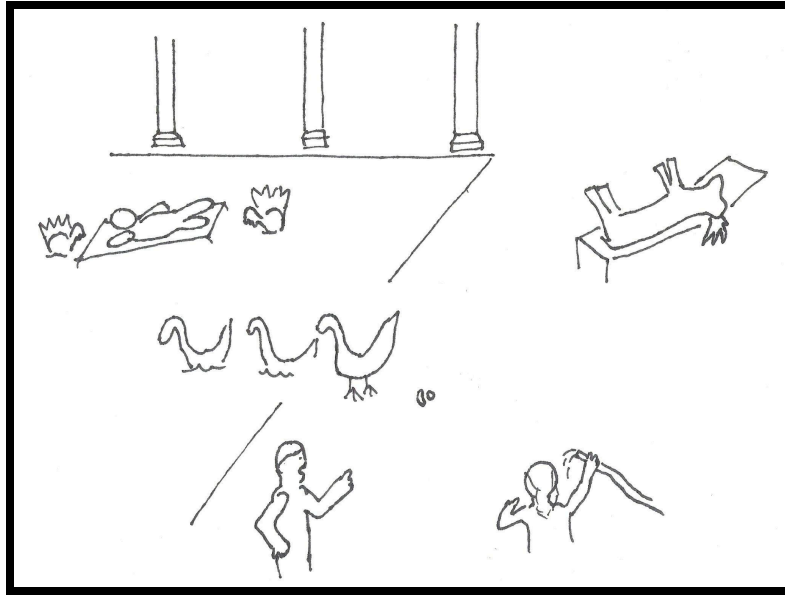
Ford says, "Congratulations, everyone! We did it! Now we need to have a big celebration. Everyone is welcome at my house for a swim party this afternoon." The scouts say "Hooray!" and each goes to their own home to rest, refresh and reset.

In the afternoon it's a pool party with all Cub Scouts and animal friends invited! The guests arrive together, excited to be outdoors and able to enjoy another golden day of summer. It's even better to spend a glorious day like this in the company of cheerful companions.

Ford's family are gracious and generous hosts. Their home is made welcoming. Everything is ready for the arrival of guests. The pool water is sparkling and piles of towels are ready on tables and chairs. Food is set up on a long buffet table.

Ford's mom puts out bowls of birdseed and other nibbles. Baby deer are eating dry corn, and birds are eating seed and cookie crumbs. Squirrels and raccoons are gathered around Alice who is holding a platter of acorns. Edie is offering strawberries, grapes and other fruit to turtles and rabbits.

Have you ever seen a turkey swim? They float like swans. What a sight to see half a dozen turkeys floating in the pool! And at the center of them all, like the biggest turkey of the bunch floats Elliot R. Wesley says, "I've heard of swimming with dolphins but never swimming with turkeys." Elliot R says to the turkeys. "Scooch over, you're crowding me." Instead they start pecking at his raft.



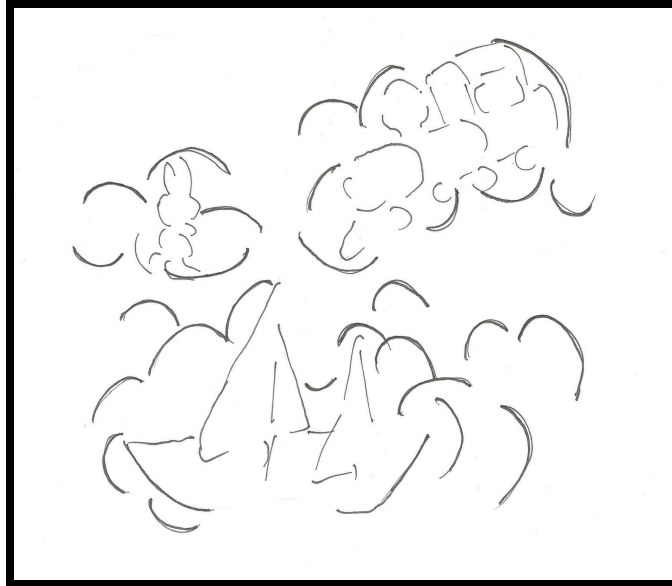
*Clean that*

Along with the animals, the Lady of the Woods and the Gardener come to watch. The Gardener approaches Dhwani and speaks with her. He says, “Dhwani, you have an insight into the world which will serve you and others well. You are right to show insects respect and to ask for their help, rather than just command them. As you gain wisdom continue to share it with the people around you.”

At the edge of the pool, Ford’s dad is supervising. He sees a group of geese and suddenly he says, “Hey, please do that on the lawn and not on the pool deck!” Then he stops calling out loud and mumbles, “Uh, oh. Too late.” He turns and says, “Maggie, come here. I have a job for you. Get a hose and wash that mess off the desk.”

Maggie says, “Me? Why do I have to do it? It’s not fair.” Her dad says, “Sometimes life is like that. Quit complaining and deal with it. This is Ford’s party so he’s busy with his guests now. He’ll have a turn at cleaning another time. Now get busy washing and keep that hose ready for more animal droppings at any time. Birds go often.”

Maggie groans, “Ugh. Ford’s gonna hear about this later.” She continues to grumble as she gets busy cleaning. Cash walks up behind her and says in his best pirate voice, “Arrr. Swab the deck, matey.” Furious, Maggie spins around and blasts him with cold hose water. Cash falls back and lands on Elliot R in the pool. “Oof!” Says Elliot R as all the air is pushed out of him. Both Cash and Elliot R struggle to find a position where they are not jabbing each other. When Elliot R gets his breath back he and Cash start arguing with each other.



### *Happy Ending*

At the end of the party after all the guests have left Ford is relaxing in the pool again, floating on an inflatable raft. He swishes his hands in the water on both sides of the raft. Ford thinks how wonderful the water feels. It's wrapping around his fingers like gloves.

A breeze stirs and blows across his wet skin, making him feel deliciously cool. A light shiver makes him warm again. Ford is so comfortable that he stops paying attention to his skin, which is almost fully healed from insect bites. He begins to see and feel past himself. As his skin disappears from his thoughts, Ford can feel like he's part of the whole world and not a small human trapped in an itchy uncomfortable layer of tight-fitting skin. Ford feels protected and safe. His mind is free again at last.

And so Ford resumes his long summer daydream of peace and contentment. This is the ideal place and way to be. He's back to feeling life is amazing and beautiful. He has his family and his mom and sisters and grandparents. He's going to see friends again soon. There's still a month of summer before school begins, and best of all, there's not an insect in sight. It just doesn't get any better than this.