Fables: A Collection

Collected works from our participants

February 2021

Workshop led by Naimah Hassan
One day Sadie the spider was spinning her web in the crock of a deck, at the bottom of the stairs leading to the garden, of a house near Seattle, Washington. Along came George, a red wiggler worm, slithering down the steps. It was a warm, glorious late September day with the bluest sky he had ever seen. The two had met before.
Sadie was in a dialogue with herself, “Oh, how am I going to finish my work today? Too much to do.” There was worry on her face as her body moved quickly about pulling silk strings as she wove them together.

“Hi Sadie, you sound upset. You always get your web finished on time,” George said.

“Oh George, how can you be so calm? All you have to do is move slowly through this garden. You don’t have to work like I do.” Then she added, “You can’t understand what my life is like.” Her tone was harsh.

“Look Sadie, I know our lives are very different. I don’t have any deadlines but I am important for keeping this backyard alive and thriving. I eat the stuff that is rotting to make way for the new buds. Just look at this fine fir tree, the two apple trees and all these shrubs. You know how you love the lavender flowers in the spring.”

“George, I’m sorry if I hurt your feelings. My life is so stressful. I have to make a new web everyday—every freakin single day.” She was almost in tears as she spoke. BANG. Sadie startled at the sound. “What was that? Something fell from the sky or was it a bomb?”

“George said, “Look Sadie below the apple tree.” One green apple was lying on the grass. “It isn’t a disaster.”

Sadie spied the apple and then went on with her spinning. It looked like fine lace with each stitch even and the borders neatly holding them together. The sunlight made them twinkle like many strands of a diamond necklace. “I’m also stressed because I laid my eggs yesterday. All 500 of them were in a sack made of my silk threads. I’m still exhausted.”

“Mazel Tov. How are they?”

“They are on their own. I’ll probably never see them again. I bet I won’t even get a phone call.”

“How is your husband? Was he excited about becoming a father.”

“After he impregnated me, I ate him.” Sadie heard George gasp. “That’s what us spiders do. He was of no use to me anymore. What about you George, do you have off spring?”

“Well worms have male and female sex organs and some of us are asexual. I didn't have a partner but I gave birth to 300 a few months ago. They’re walking around through the garden munching away,” he said with pride.

“You have such a nice outlook on life. I don’t like being so nervous all the time. But every, every day I have to make a new web.”

“Your web is particularly lovely today. It’s like fine Irish lace.”

“I am a European cross weaver. My ancestors came here thousands of years ago,” she said. Her brown and orange coloring sprinkled with white dots made her look quit fashionable as she walked about her web on her spindly, long legs.

“My heritage goes back before the glaciers covered the earth. Many worms died out but us wigglers remained in this part of the world. “He too was pleased with his endurance and ability to thrive. Both Sadie and George took some quiet moments to think. Then George said, “Sadie, I care about you. I hope you can take some time to enjoy the world around you.”

“I appreciate that. You do calm me down. George, I need to tell you, spiders only live twelve months and I have three months to go. I’m not sure I’ll be ready to leave this earth.”
“Us worms live twelve months also. I have four months to go. That’s another reason to enjoy what we have.” With that he said his good-bye. Sadie watched his copper, five inch body as it moved through the gold and red leaves. A sign that fall was on its way and winter would soon follow.

“Will I see you tomorrow?” Sadie asked.

“Same time tomorrow,” he answered.

The moral of the story is that we need to enjoy life by appreciating what we have. Friendship can help us do that.
Once upon a time in the village of Langres Par Vassil, lived a very wealthy middle-aged Parisian Muskrat named Mademoiselle Penelope Lupont. She lived at 10 ½ Montua Yonne Street, very close to the River Seine, in the upscale neighborhood of Popincourt Paris France. Penelope was the only child of the prominent family The Boudreaux's. Her father showered her with jewels and precious gems. She was a spoiled brat. She had more treasures than any of the village children. Penelope only cared for the finer things in life. She was not concerned about anyone or anything other than her precious jewels.

Dominque Goyette, or Dee Dee as she was known to her friends and family, was a small and slimy little snail with an enormous, shiny turquoise colored shell, perched on her back. Dee Dee, lived right on the river, she had for over one hundred years. She was hunched over weighted by her age and walked with an old weathered branch covered in green moss.

Dee Dee watched Penelope grow up from a bratty child to a greedy woman. Unlike Penelope, Dee Dee came from humble beginnings. Her aspiration in life was to save the villagers from the rising waters and help them cross the river to safety. Dee Dee had survived the flood of 1835; she knew it would happen again. Penelope had lived her entire life in greed and gluttony. Dee Dee felt sorry for her. What a pity she thought. She will not survive the flood, but I will help her.
Penelope ate and ate and ate until she was round and pudgy. Very unlike the Parisians, who were conscious of their appearance. She had gained an enormous amount of weight for her small body. “I love to eat chocolat fudge cake and chocolat milk,” she said, to her servants, as they watched her every night, devour an entire six-layer cake oozing with chocolat frosting.

Penelope always feared that her home would be vandalized of her jewels. So, she never, ever left home without wearing every piece jewelry daddy had left her. “I look wonderful.” Penelope would say in front of the mirror. “Why, I’m the Gran Dame of Langres.”

Every morning she would paint her pointy and wrinkled lips with her favorite red lipstick. Then neatly place her jewels around her neck, wrists, ears, fingers and oh yes, her golden Tiara was balanced on top of her head. Fifty years earlier she was crowned, the greediest lady in the village. Of course, she thought it was because she was the most beautiful of them all.

Mademoiselle Penelope would go down the local bakery with 2 cents in hand, and her ruby cane in the other. She would buy her favorite chocolat croissant covered in powdered sugar.

“Sprinkle some more she would say.”

“Of course, Mademoiselle,” the baker would reply. Only to think, such greed.

She walked slowly arched over weighted down by the gaudy and heavy chunks of gems and jewels. The villagers would smirk as she passed by them and quietly calling her “the greedy Parisian rat.” Day after day Penelope repeated the same routine, and every day she would cross paths with Dee Dee the snail.

“Beware, beware the river is rising, our village will flood.” “Prepare Penelope,” Dee Dee would warn her. “Leave your heavy gems and jewels behind,” “travel lightly, or you will never survive the rising waters, you will sink to the bottom of the river like a hundred-pound rock.” But to avail. Penelope never listened.

“Be quiet you slimy slug, get out of my way, go fill your belly with dead wood,“

“Go on, out of my way, I say.” Penelope lifted her cane high up above her head ready to strike Dee Dee]” Or I’ll crack your shell into tiny pieces”
“I will survive the flood.” "I don’t need your help.” "I'm Penelope Lupont Boudreaux.”
One night, Penelope alone in her home began to think. Is Dee Dee telling the truth? She scrabbled through boxes of newspapers that had been left in the attic by her mother. Here it is, *Le Gazette*. She flipped through the fragile pages trying to find the article of the flood of 1835. Oh, my goodness, it's true. There it was on the front page of the Sunday edition, December 22nd 1835

Hear ye hear ye, rising river waters kills many in neighboring village. Those that perished were found wearing only their jewels. She remembered her mother’s lasting words. Penelope greed will be the death of you.

Penelope thought, Dee Dee is right. What will I do without this village? What should I do? But there was no one there to answer her. She was alone.

Three days later, the winds began to howl, the sky turned dark, heavy rain began to hammer the village. The villagers began to fumble, they were running, there was chaos everywhere. The river waters were quickly rising. Penelope began to panic. How do I save myself? What about my jewels, what will I do without them? What should I do? Penelope was desperately seeking answers. Penelope thought, and pondered and pondered and thought some more. She was still alone, with no one to help her.

Penelope gathered all her gems and jewels. Her rings and necklaces, earrings and everything she cherished. She carefully placed them into an old used canvas bag, she held her golden tiara in her hand and gently placed it deep into the bag. She tied several knots around the bag and headed down to the river.

Penelope was surprised to see so many people all waiting their turn to cross the river. At the front of the line was Dee Dee herself, directing her army of snails to take the village folks across the river. “Children first,” Dee Dee, announced.

Penelope was too heavy for the smaller snails, so, she patiently waited her turn. One by one the villagers crossed to safety all had smiles of gratitude on their faces. At the end it was only Penelope and Dee Dee waiting to make the last trip across. “You can ride with me, I can take you across,” Dee Dee said. “But I cannot take you with such a heavy bag.” Penelope thought for a second, fearing the dark murky waters had reached feet. She stepped to the edge of the river, looked at the canvas bag, and gently tossed it into the river. She watched as it sank to the bottom, like a hundred-pound rock.
“Hop on,” Penelope, Dee Dee said. “I’ll take you to a new village. You can begin a new life."

Dee Dee and Penelope quietly sailed across the river, not a single word was uttered. Penelope felt such a relief, a burden had been lifted off her shoulders. She no longer depended on her gems and jewels to make her happy. “Thank you, Dee Dee,” Penelope said “You’re welcome” Dee Dee replied. “You are free now to start your life.” Penelope never thought about her gems and jewels again. Her and Dee Dee became lifelong friends helping other villagers start a new life.

The moral of the story the deadly sin GREED will destroy your life. Treasure friendship for it’s worth it weight in gold.

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One glorious summer morning, Daphne, the Adorable Dolphin was swimming in the sea. She was jumping out of the water and turning graceful somersaults in the air. She loved to swim and frolic with her mommy, brothers and sisters and cousins and aunts, playing all day long. But then, dark clouds covered the sun, and Snarky, the Snarling Shark, a bad bit of negative energy, drove up in a big, expensive boat.

Snarky, the Snarling Shark, liked to brag to everyone that he was the richest fish in the sea and the president of the ocean. He said that he could do whatever he wanted. Why? Snarky the Snarling Shark's father was mean to Snarky when he was a sharkette. He never hugged Snarky or told Snarky that he was a good shark. So Snarky passed along his meanness and abuse and shot a giant, strong fishnet into the water covering Daphne, the Adorable Dolphin. He kidnapped her. The next morning, when Daphne, the adorable dolphin, woke up, she was trapped inside Snarky the Snarling Shark's aquarium. The Shark's aquarium could talk and
he even had a name. It was Aqua, the Aquarium. He was changed into an underwater jail who did not like what Snarky the Snarling Shark forced him to do.

Before Snarky, the Snarling Shark, bought him, Aqua, the aquarium, was a beautiful, clean bay with many colorful fish, corals and underwater plants, who all lived happily together there. But Snarky, the Snarling Shark, covered Aqua the Aquarium’s sandy bottom with concrete, and he built a tall underwater fence, separating Aqua the Aquarium from the open sea. Snarky turned Aqua the Aquarium into a jail! Aqua the Aquarium did not like that Snarky the Snarling Shark changed him from a beautiful cool tropical cove into a lukewarm dolphin jail. Meanwhile, Snarky the Snarling Shark forced Daphne, the adorable Dolphin, to do tricks in Aqua the Aquarium. No tricks, no food. Snarky the shark collected money from mommy and daddy ducks so ducklings could ride on Daphne, the Dolphin’s fin. No duckling rides on Daphne, the adorable Dolphin’s fin, no food. After an exhausting day of duckling rides on her fin, Daphne, the adorable Dolphin, laid on the concrete bottom of the aquarium and cried for her family with moans, whistles, trills, grunts and squeaks, the language of dolphins. So later, when Daphne looked out through the tall underwater fence she saw her entire pod-family – her mommy, brothers, sisters, cousins and aunts, all of whom heard Daphne, the adorable dolphin crying. Everyone was very sad. But the pod included an old aunt who Daphne didn’t recognize or remember. It was Aunt Orchid, the Orca whale, her grandmother’s “black sheep” sister who heard Daphne’s plaintive cries and swam far across the sea to help. Just then, Snarky the Snarling Shark
drove past the aquarium fence very very fast, making huge waves with his big boat. That caused the dolphins and Aunt Orchid, the Orca whale, to bump onto each other, hitting their bodies on bottom boulders. Aunt Orchid, the Orca Whale, banged onto a giant rock. She got so hurt and angry that she quickly swam right up to Snarky the Snarling Shark's boat, and bit that boat in half. Snarky the Shark fell into the sea and Aunt Orchid snapped at his tail as he tried to swim away. She snapped again and again. Just then Daphne's mommy swam between them and begged old Aunt Orchid, the Orca whale, to stop. Daphne's mom had heard about how mean Snarky the Shark's father had been to him, so she pitied him and she forgave him, even though he kidnapped her daughter, Daphne the adorable Dolphin. Snarky the Shark was stunned. No one had ever pitied him before. No one had ever forgiven him before. No one was ever even kind to him before. He sank slowly and swam down into his cave at the bottom of the sea and thought deeply. He thought for a long, long time. His shark heart melted. He decided to reshape himself and become a kind, friendly and helpful shark. The next morning, Snarky the Shark swam to Aqua the Aquarium and unlocked his big steel gate to free Daphne, the adorable Dolphin. Then he threw away the lock and key. He even brought Aunt Orchid some special sea weed to heal her bruised fin. As soon as Daphne swam out of Aqua the Aquarium into the open sea, the entire pod greeted her and swam around and around Daphne the Dolphin and Snarky the (now smiling) Shark in a big circle, singing joyful dolphin songs. Their singing was so loud it could be heard on the nearby beaches. Snarky wasn't snarky any more. He was friendly to everyone and couldn't stop smiling a huge toothy shark smile. He was so happy to have friends and to be playing with the big pod of Dolphins. Everyone was laughing and singing and happy. Daphne, the Dolphin, said: “Snarky has changed. He is friendly and kind and helpful now. Let's give him a new name. Let's call him Shelley, the Smiling Shark”. So they did. Shelly liked that. And they all lived together happily ever after. Moral of the story: Kindness is Contagious.
Midnight and Bibi

By Jean Y. Leung

Illustration by Carol Sisson

Midnight stretched out her paws then curled up in front of the mystery door. There were other doors in her new home, but she’d never been able to get pass this one. Her new mother would open the door a crack and slip in, quickly closing the door before the kitten could get in. What made what lay beyond the door more tantalizing were the sounds that came from behind it.

At the same time, Bibi decided to give up, once more trying to get her new friend to react to her singing. She had been so preoccupied with her new house mate, that it was only when she began to hear soft noises coming from behind the door, that the love bird realized that the door now seemed to be permanently shut. Mother, who had sometimes left the door open, was now slipping in and out and Bibi could no longer see the world beyond.

Both of their worlds had changed recently.

For Midnight, Bibi’s songs reminded the cat of her previous home, which was open to the sky and had trees. On the branches were small creatures that could launch themselves into the air and stay afloat. When Midnight jumped, she always fell back down to earth, but not these wonders. Midnight missed their chatter.

Bibi couldn’t help wishing that Meera would respond. She and Benji had enjoyed doing duets together. Meera was different. She never moved from her spot on the side of the cage and would disappear when Bibi wasn’t in front of her. Bibi didn’t mind the absences as much as she did the silence. Benji would hop around the cage with her and match her note by note as she improvised a song.

She shuddered with the memory of the last time she’d been with Benji. He had gone to the bottom of the cage, and then fell sideways. Bibi had worried about what was going on. The previous day Benji had grown quiet and lethargic. Alarmed, Bibi hopped around him, her voice becoming shriller as she got no response. She even tried poking him with her beak, with no results. Finally, her cries got the attention of their mother.
Mother put her hand in the house and gently tapped Benji. She left and returned with a white cloth, which she wrapped around Benji, then picked him up and took him away. She didn’t return until the sky was dark outside. Bibi had rehearsed in her mind all the songs she would sing to Benji when he returned. Instead, it was just Mother peering into the cage at Bibi with sad eyes.

The next day, Mother appeared with a frame which she affixed to the side of the cage. After she left, Bibi went over to see what it was. To her surprise there was a bird in the frame. Bibi greeted her with a tentative chirp that went nowhere. Perhaps she was shy. After all this was a new place. Bibi had a hazy memory of the first time she had been here. She and Benji had been too scared to sing in the beginning.

Midnight had only recently come to this place. She also only had dim memories of the time before. She vaguely remembered her first mother and other furry bodies that she had competed with for their mother’s milk.

One day that mother didn’t come back. Midnight and her siblings cried out in hunger until one by one they stopped moving. Midnight herself was so weak that she felt, rather than saw, the warm hand that moved her into a bright, warm place.

Gradually she could recognize the face attached to the hand that squeezed droplets of milk into her mouth. Her new mother carried her around until her legs were strong enough for her to wander about on her own.

Her new home was never cold and full of soft places to explore and sleep, but the only movement and sound seemed to be the images coming from thin boxes of assorted sizes.

But these sounds, from beyond this door were different, with more of a life-like quality. What was Mother hiding behind it? Midnight could see that she was tense when the kitten was next to the door.

She decided to stay away from the door and found another favorite spot diagonally across from it. There was a padded chair here next to a window. Midnight could nap in the afternoon sun.

She was pretending to do so, when Mother opened the door. She was carrying something, so she didn’t notice Midnight carefully slipping in after her. The kitten hid under a table behind a chair.

Of course, Mother closed the door tightly when she left.
Bibi was drinking the freshwater Mother had given her when she noticed a moving black shadow. She hopped back on her perch to get a better look.

The cat climbed up on to the table using the chair as a ladder and pressed her nose against the cage sitting on it. The smell reminded her of those flying creatures of long ago. She looked at the bird now huddled on the far side of the cage. This one was much more colorful than the ones she had known, with green, red and yellow feathers.

Bibi started to shriek. “Please don’t,” Midnight pleaded. Bibi almost fell off her perch in astonishment.

“What, who are you?” Bibi screamed.

“Please lower your voice,” Midnight replied, “Mother calls me Midnight.”

Bibi stared. It was such an appropriate name. This being was as dark as the middle of the night, but with warm, inquisitive green eyes. “What are you doing here?”

“I guess I’m new here. But this is now my home. Who are you?”

“Do you know what happened to Benji?”

“Who’s Benji?”

“He was my mate. Mother took him away and he hasn’t come back.”

Midnight signed. “My first mother also didn’t come back.”

“Can you find out what happened to Benji?”

Midnight sighed again. “I can look around. What does Benji look like?”

“He’s red and green and yellow.”
“Like you?”

“Like Meera.”

“Who’s Meera?”

“This is Meera.” Bibi pointed with her wing at the frame Meera was always in.

“Oh, you mean a mirror.”

“Yes, her name is Meera.”

“That’s a mirror. There is no one there.”

Midnight had her own memory of bouncing on the mirror in the bedroom, hoping that it was one of her siblings. Mother had scooped her up and laughed. “Silly cat, that’s only a reflection. There is no one there.”

“What do you mean? She’s been here...” Bibi stopped. Maybe that was why Meera was so silent. “Meera is alive! She has to be!”

“She’s only there when you ae in front of the frame, right? And she never makes a noise, right?”

“She’s got to be alive!” Bibi moved closer to Midnight.

The cat knew exactly how the bird felt. She had curled up next to her mirror for days, refusing to believe there wasn’t another cat inside.

Bibi flew next to the frame and tried once again. She sang out her heart, then stopped. Silence. She looked at Midnight and said in a tiny voice, “because, because if she isn’t, I’m alone.”
Midnight’s ears perked up. “No, you’re not. I’m here.”

“You?” Bibi looked at the cat. “You’re too big. You can’t get in here.”

Midnight could hear footsteps. “Mother doesn’t like me being in here.”

“You see, we could never be friends,” Bibi continued.

Mother was really nice, Midnight thought. She fed her, held her, and spoke in soothing tones to her. And most of all she’d given her this peaceful home. But there were times when she was gone for hours and hours. Midnight would wander around the apartment and try not to think of the time when her first mother had gone and not come back.

“Yes, we can,” Midnight replied. “I can sneak in, like I did today.”

Just then, the door swung open, and Mother ran in and picked up Midnight. “Bad cat, bad cat!” she yelled. She hit the cat on her back and started toward the door. Midnight yelped.

Never in her life had Bibi considered leaving her house. But in a flash, she remembered Mother carrying Benji away. She had to do something. Bibi quickly lifted the cage door up with her beak and flew over to them, landing on Midnight’s head. She lifted her wings and squawked.

Mother stopped. She stared at the two. Instead of swatting the bird away, the kitten tilted her head and meowed softly. The bird seemed to coo. Mother put the cat down on the floor. Immediately the bird hopped down in front of the cat. Between the purring and the chirping, she could swear they were talking to each other.

“All right Midnight, you can stay. I guess the bird likes you.” She sat down and took out one of the thin boxes. She touched it a few times and put it to her ear. “You won’t believe tis. But I guess we can give up looking for a home for Midnight...”

The cat purred and meowed. “Thanks for rescuing me.”

“That’s what friends are for.”

The moral of this tale is: Friends can come in all sizes and shapes.