

Magwort and the Master

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The Chronicles of Peniel

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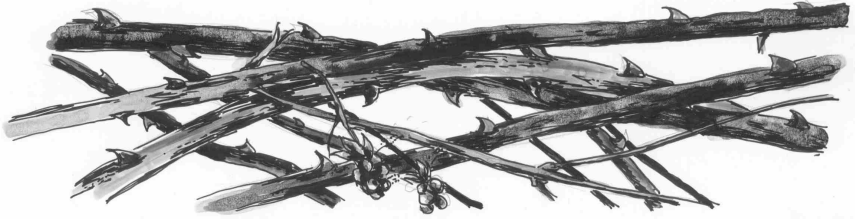
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a children's book for grown-ups

and

a grown-ups' story for children



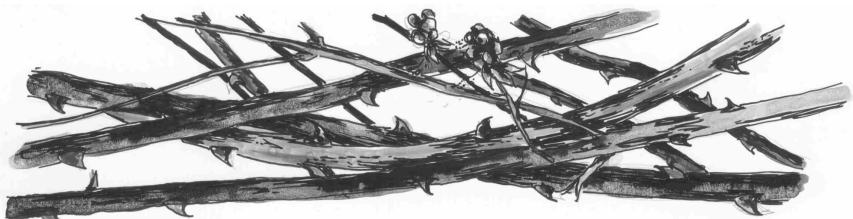


Once within a time, in a land of thorns and thistles, a mighty horse named Magwort galloped across the plains of that place. Magwort's hoofs pounded the ground as he ran, frightening the other animals. The earth shook whenever the great horse jumped into the air and landed on the dusty ground. The other animals warned one another, "Look out! There is Magwort the Terrible! Hide! Here comes Magwort the Fierce!"

His nostrils flared in anger and pumped great clouds of steam when the weather was cold. Some of the animals thought smoke blew from the gray horse's nostrils. Magwort shook his head from side to side in a wild rage whenever he reared into the air. His long, shaggy mane was filled with cocklebur, cheat grass and small insects. Magwort's long hair whipped and whirled in the wind.

Many believed Magwort to be the greatest horse in the land. His muscular neck was strong enough to knock over burly trees. In fact, they believed Magwort to be the greatest war-horse in all the land. But such a thought was foolish, for Magwort was not a war-horse. He had not been tested and he had never, ever been ridden. At the thought of being ridden, the gray horse would rear on his hind legs and snort into the air, "I am ... I am Magwort the Untamed!"

Magwort's broad, thick chest could bowl over every stallion foolish enough to get in his way. The powerful horse's most dangerous weapons, however, were his hoofs. If attacked from behind, his rear hoofs knocked the wind out of the opponents and sent them flying. If a creature tried a head-on assault, Magwort's front hoofs would slash the challenger. The gray horse stomped the enemy with his horrible hoofs. Both black and white horses had confronted the gray stallion. They all lost.



It soon came to be that in all the land, no creature dared challenge the untamed beast. This does not mean the other animals liked Magwort. Because, if the truth be known, they did not care for him at all. Magwort was not mean to his fellow creatures and he did not wage war against them. He remained alone and away from all the other creatures in the land. The separation was fine with the other animals and they tried to stay away from Magwort. The great, gray horse ruled over the land and traveled anywhere he desired. No one on the face of the earth kept him from entering or exiting a place.



Of course, this did not include The Valley of the Shadows, the one place in this land of thorns and thistles where no one ever went. Many stories were told of The Valley of the Shadows and most of them, in one way or another, involved the Master. Magwort knew of the place but had no desire to enter it.

An inky crow, flying safely above the magnificent horse, cried out, "Magwort never goes into The Valley of the Shadows because he is afraid of the Master."

The angry horse reared but his whirling hoofs could not reach the mocking crow. The gray beast snorted, "Come down here where your tongue may feel the bite of my hoofs."



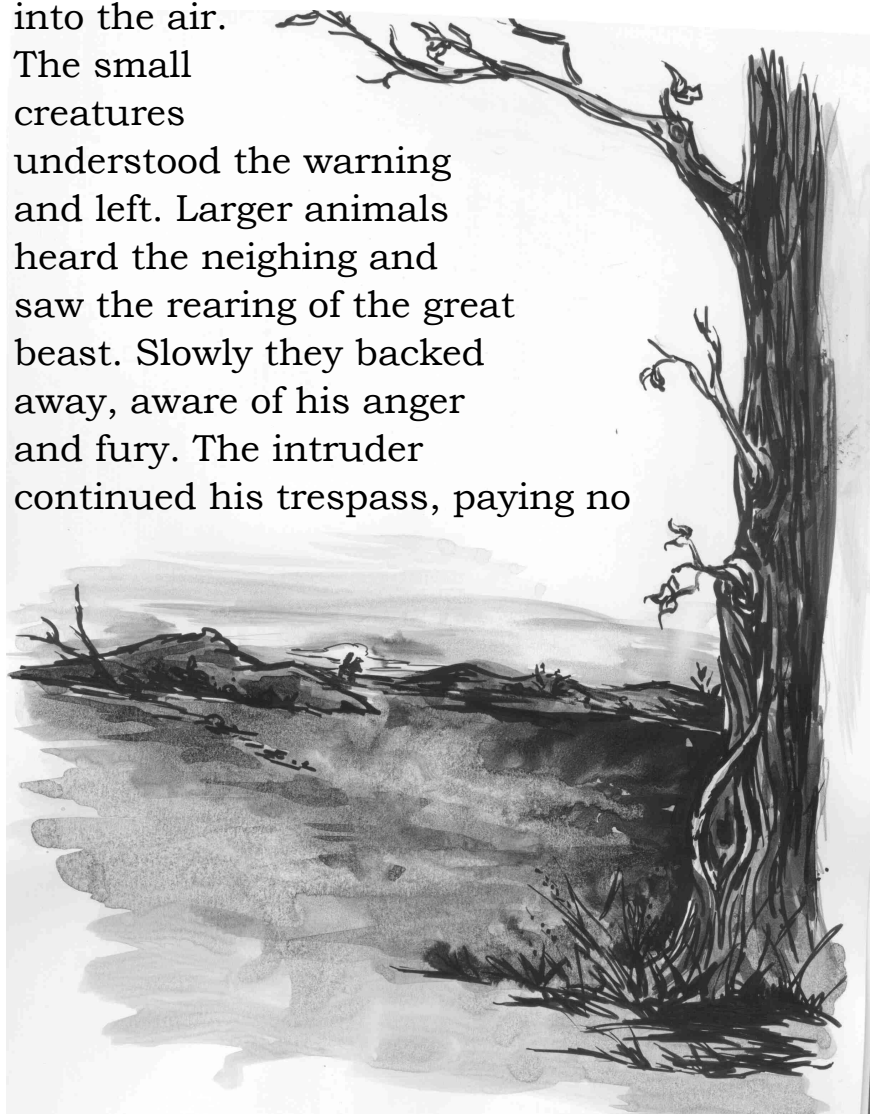
The bird said something about being weaker but not stupid. Little did the crow know he had guessed the truth; Magwort was afraid. Magwort the Untamed did not need to guess. He knew the truth. He was afraid.

The awful dread of The Valley of the Shadows could be seen. A large boulder known as The Weeping Rock marked the boundary. Beyond the boulder, a thick cloud hung low to the ground. The fog, which was neither white nor black, kept everyone from seeing past The Weeping Rock. The old storytellers spoke of a dead tree beyond the boulder.



One bright day in the spring of the year, when the land bore the green fuzz of sprout and bud, Magwort eyed an intruder in the distance. The gray beast shook his ratty mane and snorted into the air.

The small creatures understood the warning and left. Larger animals heard the neighing and saw the rearing of the great beast. Slowly they backed away, aware of his anger and fury. The intruder continued his trespass, paying no

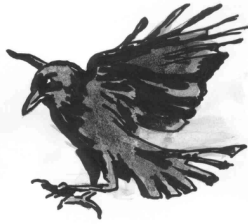


attention to the steaming, snorting, puffing breathes of the mighty Magwort.

"Surely," thought the gray horse, "the trespasser is deaf and doesn't hear me. He is blind and can't see me."

The trespasser continued the steady pace. He approached Magwort the Horrible without stopping or looking at him. The gray horse watched the rider and waited a moment before rearing high, raising his hoofs and neighing loudly. The invader continued without hesitating.



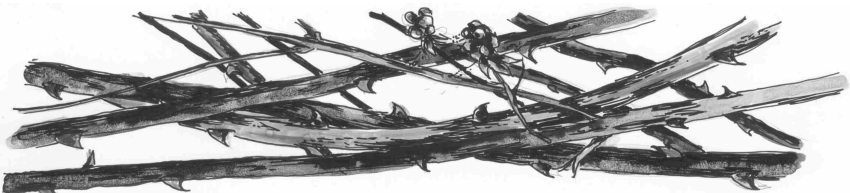


The mocking crow circled above the puzzled horse and cawed, "It's the Master on a donkey! It's the Master on a donkey!"

Slowly the beast of burden plodded along the way. The Master wore a seamless garment with a hood covering his head and face. He bore no armor and carried no weapon. Magwort sniggered as he watched the stranger pass. The Master kept his eyes on the road ahead, never looking at Magwort as he rode.

The hooded rider spoke a single word, "Come."

"Come?" pondered the puzzled Magwort to himself. "I do not take orders. I give orders. I am Magwort the Untamed! The Master is not so much. I fear him not. He should fear me. Perhaps he should learn what fear is."



The lowly donkey continued the steady pace for several minutes. Each short, plodding step brought the Master closer to The Valley of the Shadows. Magwort's anger increased with each step taken by the tame beast of burden. The muscles of the gray stallion tightened. He took a deep breath through his flared nostrils. He pawed and scratched deep trenches in the ground. Dust danced from his gouging hoofs.



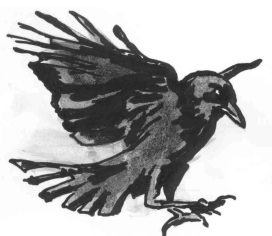
Without warning Magwort the Awful began his charge. The Master was nearly in the cloud. Within five strides, Magwort was at full speed. Every second he closed the distance to his target. Slinging foamy saliva from his gaping mouth, he lowered his head for the collision. Magwort would bowl over both of the intruders and send them tumbling into The Valley of the Shadows.

At this instant, the donkey stopped beside The Weeping Rock and the Master dismounted. The Master walked to the boulder as Magwort changed direction to avoid a collision. The gray stallion jerked to one side and narrowly avoided hitting the donkey. In a rather unbecoming and ungraceful manner, Magwort slid past the boulder and the Master. A thick cloud of dust and fog billowed in The Valley of the Shadows.



Magwort scrambled to his feet and gagged in the dust-thickened fog. He could see nothing except the dead tree at his side. As the dust settled, Magwort strained his eyes, beholding the Master on his knees at The Weeping Rock. His hood was down and his face could be seen. Magwort strained in his attempt to identify the man kneeling at the sad stone. Tears formed in the piercing eyes of the Master who was now speaking to someone. Tilting his ears to the correct position allowed the horse to hear what the man was saying. Magwort the Terrible became embarrassed as he heard the Master begging something from someone. Magwort, however, saw no one else.





Magwort thought, "The Master is to be pitied, not feared. He is crazy. He is no threat to me. Even here, within the cloud of The Valley of the Shadows, nothing threatens me. I will wait here and watch."

The Master remained at the boulder for an hour, pleading three times with the unseen someone. Afterward, he stood and walked to the beast of burden. He patted the tame creature on the head and took something from a bag on its back. Magwort tensed at the possibility of a weapon being drawn by the Master. He relaxed when he saw it was a rope-like piece of leather.



The Master turned to the untamed horse and commanded in a firm but gentle voice, "Stay."

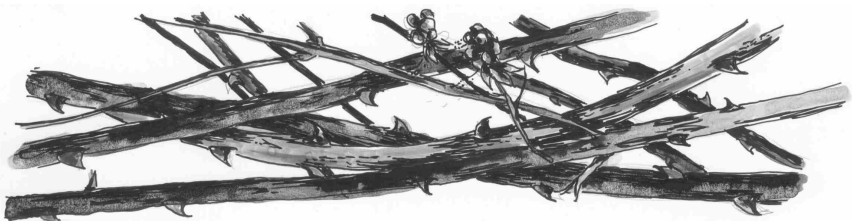
"Stay?" thought Magwort who was offended at this word, "I stay because I choose, not because he speaks."

The Master slipped the bridle onto Magwort and guided the bit into the gray stallion's mouth. The beast shook his head trying to shed the bridle. He arched his neck trying to spit out the bit. The Master held the long reins loosely, not wanting the bit to bite.



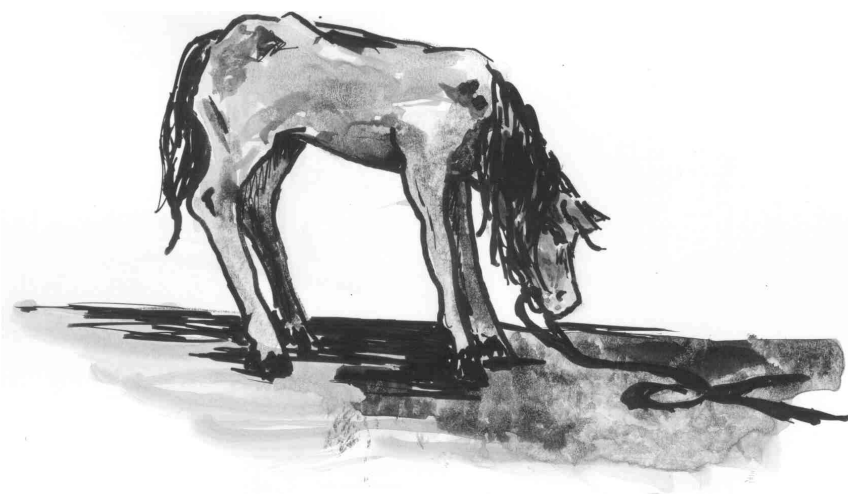


Rebelling in fear, Magwort reared. The reins tightened and pulled on the bit causing it to turn in the stallion's mouth. Magwort received a sharp slap in the roof of his mouth. The pain caused the horse to rear again. The bit bit again. The Master held the reins. The great Magwort fought him, driving his slashing hoofs into the Master. The bit bit once more. Though wounded and bleeding, the Master tightened his grip on the leather leads. Magwort charged and trampled the Master. The bit bit once again.





The piercing pain stopped the raging stallion. He sensed the Master behind him. Magwort planted his front feet and, using every ounce of his muscular hind legs and hoofs, kicked the Master. The Master received the full force of the blow. It sent him through the air into The Valley of the Shadows. He landed in the jagged limbs of a dead tree. The Master hung there and could not come down. The reins remained in the hand of the Master. Though he was dying, he would not let go. Magwort was also in terrible pain, for when the Master flew through the air, the bit bit harder than ever before. Magwort had never known such pain. To slacken the reins, he leaped instantly in the direction of the Master. The untamed horse never, ever, forever and ever wanted to feel that pain again.



The gray stallion stood silently beside the tree that was dead and the Master who was dying. Magwort's mouth throbbed and his head pounded. He hung his neck. His eyes followed the slack reins from the bit in his mouth to the rawhide tethers in the Master's clenched hand. Magwort would wait until the Master died. Then the horse would slowly pull the reins from the clenched hand of the Master. Magwort waited six hours in the cloud that was neither white nor black. The cloud became thicker and thicker.

The Master said one word with his dying breath, "Done."

"Done!" repeated Magwort in victory, "You are dead. A worthy opponent. No one has done better than you. Still, I have defeated you. The Master is dead!"

Slowly, the gray stallion backed from the body of the Master. The slack in the rein was taken up. The bit bit lightly in the horse's sore mouth. Magwort winced, whined and whinnied. The Master's hand gripped the reins and would not release them. Magwort the Fierce cried. Magwort the Untamed wept.

When he had no more tears to shed, Magwort became angry. Never before had his fury risen to such a level. The beast charged forward and crashed into the dead tree that held the lifeless body of the Master. A single, loud crack was heard as the dead tree split from top to bottom. The dead tree toppled, crashing to the ground and sending the body of the Master into a deep hole. Magwort looked at the leather reins going from the bit in his mouth to the dark hole in front of him. The horse backed up slowly. The bit bit. The Master's hand kept the gray beast from raising his head more than two inches off the ground. He could only bend his neck low, smell the cursed ground and look into the death hole. Magwort wept once more.

A piece of leather, a steel bit and the clenched hand of the Master held Magwort the Untamed in place. Magwort the Fierce could only whimper through a sore mouth and a broken spirit. To make matters worse, the gray stallion could no longer see himself. His gray hide blended with the thick cloud that surrounded him. The cloud, which was neither white nor black, hid Magwort. He wondered whether or not he was alive. He knew he existed because he could taste the metal bit and feel the pain in his wounded mouth.

Magwort remained by the hole for many hours. The many hours became a few days. It was difficult for him to know how many days and nights he remained there. All he knew was that he was thirsty, tired, hungry and sore.

If the truth be known, Magwort stayed by the hole for three days and two nights. Early in the morning, at the dawn of the third day, Magwort heard someone standing beside him. Without moving his head, for fear of being hurt by the bit, the horse glanced to the side. The Master held the rein in his hand.

The Master announced, "Alive!"

"Alive?" said Magwort to himself. "What does this mean? Can it be that the Master, who died, has come back to life? Has he risen from his death hole?"

The Master placed his hand under the horse's sore mouth and gently, ever so gently, lifted his head. Never had Magwort felt so sore and so good in his life. Never had he been so thirsty and so satisfied in all the years of his life. Never had he been so hungry and so filled in all his entire life.



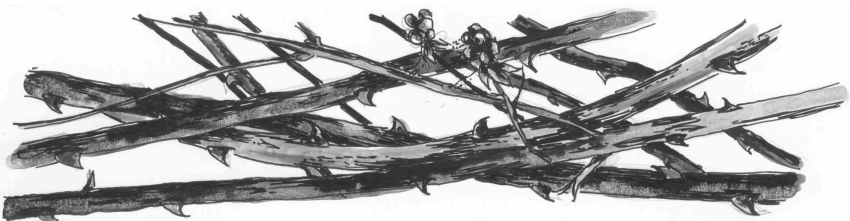
The Master guided Magwort by directing his head. He led the gray stallion deeper into The Valley of the Shadows. Magwort smelled the water before he saw it. His thirst rose in anticipation. The Master led him beside the still waters, allowing him to drink deeply from the life-giving fountain. He walked Magwort into the middle of the pool. After a few steps the grateful horse did not have to lower his neck to drink. Magwort now had a different feeling about the Master. This is not to say the horse loved the Master, but he no longer hated him. Magwort now had no desire to kill him.



The great horse relaxed and breathed a breath of satisfaction.

In one, sudden motion, the Master leaped from the chest deep water and onto the back of Magwort. The gray beast reared high. The Master pulled on the reins. The bit bit. The horse's sore mouth screamed in pain and anger. The Master's heels clenched the sides of the thrashing horse.

Try as he might, Magwort could not rid himself of the rider on his back. He struggled and fought against the Master and the water. The horse's chest heaved from the effort. The Master remained on Magwort's back. Foam from the horse's lather mixed with the foam created by the turbulent water and the froth covered both horse and rider.



Magwort summoned his strength for one last attempt at freedom. He arched his back and bucked as he ascended from the water. The Master stayed in place. When horse and rider reached the pinnacle of the leap, the Master wrenched the right rein. Magwort jerked his head and neck to the side, twisting his body in mid-air.

Even though Magwort and the rider landed on their backs in the water, the Master remained in riding position. They plunged into the water and sank, the full weight of the beast driving the Master against the rocky bottom. Magwort could not get to his feet because the Master held the reins. Magwort's flaring nostrils filled with the killing water and the gray horse knew he was dying. When the stallion was nearly unconscious, the Master relaxed the reins.



Magwort surfaced and took a huge gulp of air. He coughed and spit and gasped as he cleared his lungs. His chest and neck heaved as he struggled to breathe. Exhausted from the effort, Magwort could only stand in the middle of the water. The Master remained on Magwort's back.

The Master declared, "Mine!"

"Mine?" Magwort mused. "Yes, ... yours, my Master. I am no longer Magwort the Untamed. What should I call myself, Magwort the Conquered?"

"No," replied the Master in a golden voice. "You are Magwort the Meek."

"Magwort the Meek? Oh, how far I have fallen from what I once was."

"No," said The Master, "How far you have risen from what you once were. Meek does not mean weak or puny or cowardly. Meek means power, might and strength that are under control; under my control. While you are now a tame horse, that does not mean you are less of a horse. Truly, truly, I say to you, you are more horse now than ever before in your life. You have been tamed by the Master and you are now harnessed for his service. Now you will become a war-horse."

From that day, Magwort the Meek belonged to the Master and remained with him. The gray stallion grew to fear, love and trust his caring Master. Old people seated in carts and wagons received rides from him. Little children rode on the muscular back of Magwort the Meek.

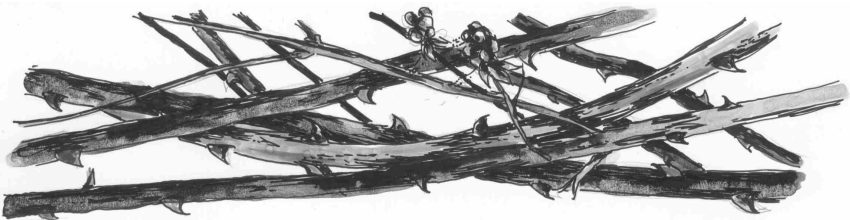


But mostly Magwort fought battles in the service of his Master. The magnificent horse, now a mighty warrior and often weary and wounded, remained steadfast in the Master's service. The other animals began calling the gray stallion Magwort the War-horse. This was now true, for he was a tame horse, one owned by and in the calling of the Master. Still the gray stallion preferred Magwort the Meek because that was the name given him by the Master.

Magwort the Meek became stronger and braver and more powerful than ever before, for we must remember that *meek* does not mean *weak*.

The Master cared for the horse and provided for all his needs. Magwort was invited to the Master's feast where the horse ate often and always departed in peace. The Master brushed the horse's mane and removed cocklebur, cheat grass and, on many occasions, pesky insects. The Master's voice guided him during the day and comforted him at night. After a bad dream, Magwort would hear the Master's voice whispering in the darkness, "Magwort is Mine."

Life with the Master continued for many years. The bit remained in the horse's mouth and the bit bit a bit every now and then, that is, when he tried to be Magwort the Untamed. But for the most part, the gray horse was Magwort the Meek. He remained thankful for all the Master had done for him.



One special morning, the voice of the Master called to Magwort the Meek, "Arise!"

"Arise?" thought Magwort the Meek and then repeated aloud, "Yes, arise."

As Magwort the Meek got to his feet, he noticed both bit and bridle were no longer in place. They were gone. Magwort's old wounds no longer hurt. They were gone. The infected sore caused by puncture weed was gone. He shook his mane, noting no tangles from cocklebur, no snarls from cheat grass and no irritating insects plaguing him. These were gone.

Magwort the Meek looked at the Master with a questioning expression.

"Thorns and thistles?" replied the Master. "They are no more. They are part of the former things. Before you is a new earth. It is all yours. It is one of my many gifts to you. Indeed, Magwort the Meek ... enter."

The horse said, "Enter?"

"Yes. Magwort the Meek, enter into the joy of your Master."

+ + +

Blessed are the meek.



... coming to you, lowly and sitting on a donkey ...

A Greek historian named Xenophon lived and wrote 2,400 years ago. Xenophon, pronounced ZEN-uh-fahn, traveled with the troops commanded by Cyrus the Younger of Persia. One of Xenophon's writings is titled *Cyropaedia*, an account of Cyrus the Great's education, discipline, doctrine and practice. Within that work is a description of how Cyrus prepared his army for war. The Greek word for *meek* or *gentle* is used twice in one paragraph in which the training of soldiers and horses is described:

Cyrus also did this, he never let them go to the morning meal or to supper without having sweated. He lead them on hunts for a sweat or he would devise games for a sweat, and again, if he had some business or other, he conducted it so they would not come back without sweating. He thought this beneficial to their meals, to their health and to their enduring affliction, for he considered hardships beneficial to their being *long-suffering* to one another, just as horses that endure miseries with one another stand more *gently* together. In any event, those who share the knowledge that they are well drilled are more noble in combat.

[2.1.29]

