

# O Great Rosenfeld!

**In Which Our Esteemed Leader, Rosenfeld, and His Tribe of 33 and 1/2 Followers Find Themselves Trapped Between a Bunch of Very Dangerous Cliffs and the Wilsons, a Seriously Terrible Tribe of Marauders Who are Coming After our Sally, the Most Beautiful Woman in the World**

*by* DANIEL WALLACE



Those who have ears should listen, and those who have eyes should read, for here I tell the tale of the Great Rosenfeld, of the lands he has seen and conquered, and also of those he has seen and *tried* to conquer, but found the task in one way or another too difficult, or too much trouble, and left before something even worse happened. Gods of the land and air and sea, be you one god or many, acknowledge the Great Rosenfeld as one of your own! Does he not possess your capacity for vengeance? Does he not also possess your capacity for mercy? He can also be really funny. It is that quality in a man women are said to admire most.

O Great Rosenfeld the 3! He is a leader without parallel, anywhere you could possibly think of, in the world ahead of us or the world behind, and of all those other groups such as the

Smiths or the Wilsons – the avaricious Wilsons! – surely there is none more wonderful than the Great Rosenfeld!

Rosenfeld! Let every man, woman and child say his name, together, and listen as it echoes through the land. *Rosenfeld!* What greater blessing is there, that we, alone among all the world’s pilgrims, can claim him as our leader? Let us all rejoice!

Even so, all is not well. Soon there will be war.

The Wilsons are coming.

The Wilsons are a band of large and terrible men and (one hears) equally vicious women. The Earth itself rumbles as their heavy steps approach. They are not coming for our riches, for we have none; nor are they coming for our land, for we have none of that either. They are coming for Sally, Sally the Most Beautiful. Wilson has seen her and has vowed to make her his own. Her beauty has been known to drive many a sane man wild with desire, but usually it’s your odd straggler, your pathetic loner, your accidental scout: this is the first time the leader of a Great Horde has spied her.

This, for us, was unfortunate.

They will kill us all with the utmost ease. We’re not much in the way of fighting men and women. They could kill us in their sleep.

I know nothing. I am but a scribe. But one would think that Rosenfeld might choose this time to begin defensive preparations, or, at the very least, seek a place to hide. Perhaps at this moment that is exactly what he is doing – his eyes closed, a whisper of a smile on his sleeping face: he is dreaming up The Great Plan.

One can only hope.

I have taken the liberty of drawing his picture.

My pen cannot do justice to his physical appearance: it is impossible to say with complete



certainly the exact nature of his true form, for there is something about him unfit to be seen by mortals. But for the record let's just say he is neither the strongest, nor the wisest, nor perhaps the fleetest of foot. Still, he is a Rosenfeld! And Rosenfelds have been our leaders since there have been words to write about them, and that means for a *really long time*, just as my family – the Ashburton-Mosbys – have always been the scribes. So it is in his blood, that special leadership thing, as it was in his father's blood, and in his father before him . . .

We miss his father, Rosenfeld the 2, our leader for many years. Fearlessly he took us from the sea to this spot in the high mountains, and then, as my father wrote in his own words before me, "tripped and fell off the edge of a cliff."

A sheer drop. We watched him fall for what seemed like minutes before he disappeared into the greenery below. A scout was sent to fetch him, but by the time the body was found it had been picked clean by every animal within a hundred miles, each one savoring a bite of a Rosenfeld's flesh, after all those years of cowering at the sound of his footsteps!

Thus his only son became our leader, and in his first act of leadership he led us some distance away from the cliff, and that evening around the council fire he made a new law. WE SHALL STAY AWAY FROM CLIFFS. And everybody agreed, and celebrated the wisdom of our new leader, the Great Rosenfeld!

It is this law, however, which has made further progress impossible, for we have come to a place in our journey where, to move forward, we must cross at least one cliff, and possibly many more besides. Rosenfeld says there is no way we are going to do this. "You saw what happened to my father," he says to us. "He was a Rosenfeld, and even he fell. What do you think will hap-

pen to the rest of you?"

No doubt we would all fall, each of us, and if we did not fall we would have to jump, for otherwise how could it be explained, that a Rosenfeld fell and another, not a Rosenfeld, did not?

We are now camped in a clearing on the side of a giant mountain. We number 33 and a  $\frac{1}{3}$ . This number includes 13 men, 10 women, 10 children, and Roy, who was born with only half a



body. The upper half, thankfully. Otherwise he is a fine young man with very strong arms.

We have been here a long time – seventy-three marks against the Big Stone – long enough to plant a garden and watch it grow.

I heard Big Akins yesterday, in the woods away from our camp, cursing Rosenfeld and the law he made about cliffs. "The law should be, BE VERY CAREFUL AROUND CLIFFS. That's the lesson here. Not *stay* away. His father tripped! It could happen to anybody." He picked up a rock and angrily crushed it into dust with one of his large hands. "We can't stay here much longer. How long before the Wilsons catch up to us? What will we do then? I know what I will do –



fight! But who will fight with me? And who in this raggedy outfit of misfits and mistakes would I want fighting with me? Not a one of them!"

Akins is a big man. When he sneezes, the rest of us catch a cold. When he yawns he can swallow the darkness, and he can crush a small rock with his eyelids, blinking. I have seen it.

And what sort of man would put a rock in his own eye? Only Big Akins.

He is right about the Wilsons, though. They are coming for us, and when they find us, it

will not be good.

It will not be good at all.

**O Great Rosenfeld!** Words are not enough when it comes to describing the glory which is you. I need music. I need art. I need nature itself to join me in this celebration! The hoot of the owl, the screech of the crow, the bark of the dog! The ink in my pen is not worthy to transcribe your exploits here; it smudges and runs. I should use the blood of our enemies, those foolhardy enough to believe that they could mount a challenge to our somewhat small, fearful and generally frail band of men, women and children (and the half-man Roy), when it is you who stands before us, when it is you who through the carefully cadenced dialogue of a true leader shows



mercy upon the stupidly encroaching hordes and says, "What did we ever do to you?"

But my pen is all I have. It was my father's pen, just as it was his father's pen before him. It's a stick with a piece of charcoal tied to it with the sinew from a deer's leg.

When we came to the Land Before the Cliffs, together we admired the fields of green, the tall trees, the fecund soil good for the growing of tomatoes. There was no one for miles around. "There's a reason for that," Big Akins said to his old wife as he prepared for bed (I was within earshot, behind a nearby tree). "This is nowhere. Who makes camp on the side of a mountain? I can't sleep for fear of rolling down it in the middle of the night. Rosenfeld is a fool!"

Big Akins doesn't think enough about the words he uses. If Rosenfeld were a fool, would he be our leader? Also: If Rosenfeld were a fool, wouldn't that make the rest of us even bigger

fools - and Big Akins the biggest fool of them all? So I don't think he knows what he's saying.

But, sleeping on the side of a mountain *is* a problem. The angle is such that one does slip a bit during the course of a night, and it is not a rare occurrence to wake up several feet away from where you closed your eyes. Around a council fire the subject was broached by Agatha, the cook. Rosenfeld sat atop the Big Stone, and the rest of us lined up before him, the fire between us.

Agatha: “I have no words but words of praise!”

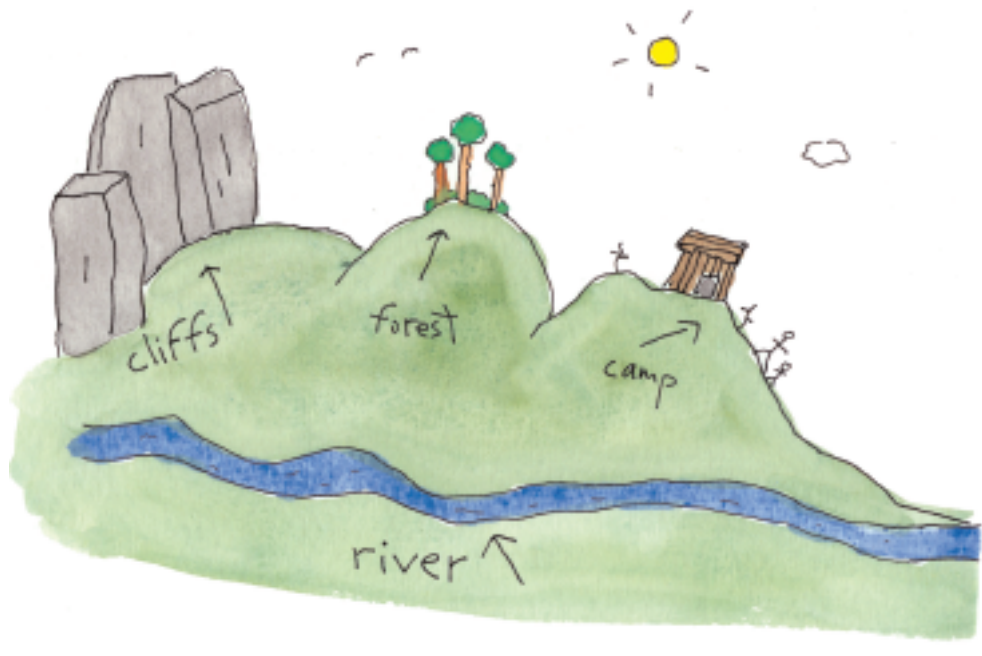
The rest of us: “As do we all!”

Agatha: “Give me this chance to praise our leader!”

The rest of us: “So be it if Rosenfeld says it be!”

Rosenfeld: “Sure. Go ahead.”

Agatha: “Last night, as we slept, my baby - Charlie, the Crying One - was visited by the



most awful nightmares, which made him thrash and turn in his sleep, and thus, though I had secured him well behind a wall of stones and branches, he knocked them aside and commenced to roll down the side of the mountain. I heard him cry out, and this woke me, but by this time he

was far away and picking up speed as he rolled, and as fast as I could run, it was not fast enough to stop my rolling child. On the journey down he suffered many bumps and bruises, and now is afraid to go to sleep at all, for he believes that it was the Great Beast which hurled him down the mountain, and he wants to be ready when He returns."



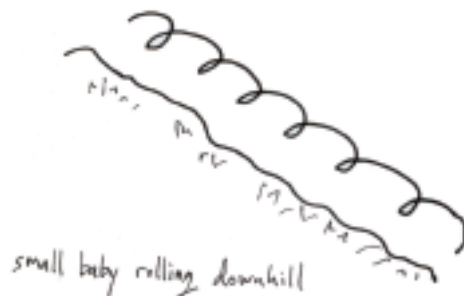
Rosenfeld: "So he's okay?"

Agatha: "For the most part, O Great Rosenfeld."

Rosenfeld (quietly, in an aside, to me): "What does she expect *me* to do about it? The kid could stand to lose some weight. He looks like a ball!"

Me: "Perhaps you can offer some solution to her problem."

Rosenfeld nods, thoughtfully, and appears to consider her complaint.



Rosenfeld: "Agatha, first, sorry about Charlie. Glad he's okay. I've always been fond of

him. Second, though, I hope you're not suggesting we leave the Land Before the Cliffs."

Agatha: "My tongue would never curl around such words!"

Rosenfeld: "Because there's no way we're going to do that. Have you taken a look at those cliffs? My father fell off one not nearly as dangerous as those cliffs look. So that's not happening."

Big Akins: "With all due respect, O Great One, those cliffs do not look all that dangerous to me. Some of them may not even be cliffs."

Rosenfeld: "I know a cliff when I see one, Akins. Believe me, they're dangerous."



Big Akins: "Yes. But they are only dangerous if one walks *close* to them. Were we to walk through the fields and pastures between here and the cliffs themselves, I think there is a good



chance we would survive, and soon come to a better land.”

Rosenfeld laughs the laugh of a man who likes the sound of his own laughter.

Rosenfeld: “Big Akins. You are no doubt big, thus your name. But there is a reason you were not called Smart Akins. Or Wise Akins. Or Akins the Thoughtful. Because there are things about cliffs you simply do not know. Scribe, tell us that tale.”

Me: (perplexed) “Which tale is that, O Great Rosenfeld?”

Rosenfeld: “The one about the cliffs, Scribe. You know the one.”

Me: “Of course.”

I turn the pages of the Book, the Book within which the history of our tribe is written, by me and my forebears, years and years worth of accumulated words and pictures describing our journey. There is the Tale of Two Birds, the Tale of the Yawning Cavern, the Tale of the Lost Thing We Found, just to name a few. I’ve read every page, of course, and committed each to memory. And yet I don’t seem to remember a tale about cliffs.

Rosenfeld: (prompting) “Many years ago . . .”

Me: “Many years ago . . .”

Rosenfeld: “. . . there was a people . . .”

Me: “. . . there was a people . . .”

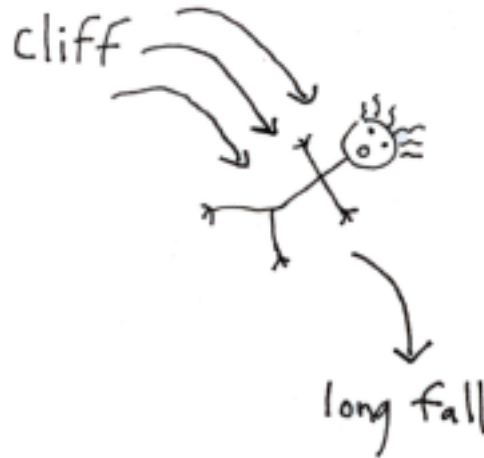
Rosenfeld: “. . . *who thought it was okay to walk by cliffs!*”

Rosenfeld is losing his temper, and this is how I know the tale is not inside the Book in my lap, but one yet to be born within my own head. It is this talent which makes for a good scribe: the ability to read what is yet to be written, and then, later, in the privacy of his own hut, write it down.

Me: “Oh. Yes. Now I remember the ancient tale. The people who thought it was okay to walk by cliffs. They were called . . . the Cliff Walkers. Yes, the Cliff Walkers – thus they were

called even though they sometimes walked *quite far away* from the edge of the cliffs themselves. In the beginning, they numbered in the thousands. A mighty band of intrepid wanderers. And yet each year their number decreased by one at least, as each year one man was chosen to be thrown off a cliff and into the maw as a sacrifice to whatever god was down there. And the rest walked on.

“For many years the Cliff Walkers continued their cliff-walking, and for many years they tossed another unlucky man over the edge, whatever edge they happened to be near – until one among them suggested they could make their way past the cliffs without any kind of sacrifice at



all. This sounded good to the others. So they passed by the cliffs with great bluster and laughter, and then - ”

Agatha: “And then?”

Rosenfeld: “And then?”

I look around me, and it is all silence, and every man and woman is staring at me, and they seemed to have stopped breathing, so have my words engaged them.

Me: “And then, then a great wind blew, a wind so strong it felt like the hand of a god pushing the Cliff Walkers closer and closer to the edge of the cliffs, until all of them - men, women,

children, dogs - all were swallowed up into the maw, and they were gone, gone forever, and all that is left is this tale we tell about them now."

And there was silence all around.

Rosenfeld: "The dogs too, huh?"

Me: "The dogs too."

Rosenfeld: "But the dogs didn't have anything to do with it. Why didn't they leave the dogs alone?"

Me: "The gods can be vengeful, O Great Rosenfeld."

Rosenfeld: "Tell me something I don't know. But even a vengeful god I think would leave the dogs alone."

Rosenfeld has a soft spot for the furry canine.

Me: "Yes. And perhaps in fact they did leave the dogs alone, and over the years the tale has been corrupted."

Rosenfeld: "So, the dogs were okay then?"

Me: "Probably. Certainly. Yes."

Which brings a smile.

Rosenfeld: "Good, good."

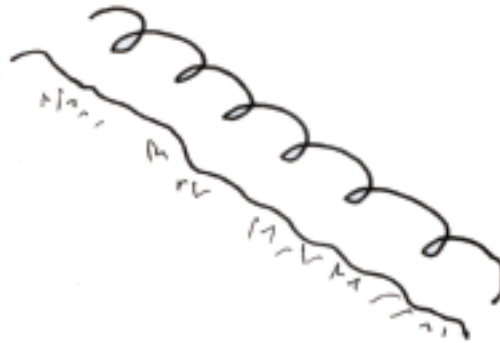
And then again came the booming voice of Big Akins, and this time it was as if the ground itself shook, and the sky, unsure of itself, fluttered like a sheet in the wind: "Wilson is coming. He wants our Sally. He brings an army of a thousand men.



What of the cliffs then, Rosenfeld?"

Rosenfeld: (cryptically) "What there is to be done we will do, as has always been done by us, and none other than us, since however long ago that might be."

Thus with his cleverness Rosenfeld stymied Big Akins, and then the fire council was at an end, and that night, again, we heard Charlie roll to the bottom of the mountain, and his mother, cursing, chasing after.



**O Rosenfeld! Wisest of the wisest wise men! If there is more of the world to be known than what you know already, who needs to know it?**

And yet, as little pleasure as it brings me to say this, it is possible that in this one instance, Akins speaks the truth.

The Wilsons are coming, and from us they will take the one thing of value we possess: Sally. Sally is – well, beauty itself.

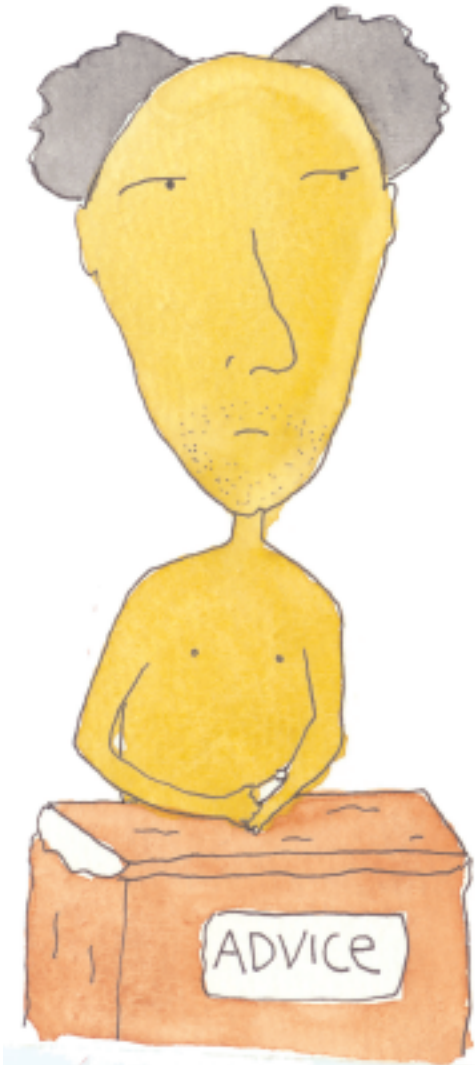
But beauty has many faces.

To look at Sally is to feel rewarded for having eyes. And yet it is because of her that we have come to this, trapped on a hillside surrounded by cliffs, hunted like animals. All things good and all things not so good alike – do they not come from women?

If we are all to perish, then, because of Sally, I should write how this came to be, the begin-

ning of our end – yet another great value in having a scribe. For when the entire Rosenfeld clan is run through with sharp stakes, and dismembered, and our body parts thrown into the deep part of the forest in supplication to the Great Beast, this blood-stained parchment may yet survive us, and the world will know that we were here. This doesn’t make me feel a lot better about being dismembered, but I guess it’s better than nothing.

This was during the time of Rosenfeld the 2, which, though it seems many ages ago now, was in fact not so long at all. A couple of months, if that.



At any rate, we were camped along the Vardan Road, a very popular trading route where clans rich in, say, pine straw bedding, bartered with those rich in shiny rocks or interesting soaps. The Vardan Road was of course named after a man named Vardan Road. He was the first to trade here. He possessed nothing of real value, but he was a man of strong opinions, so he traded his advice for food and small pieces of cloth. “I wouldn’t go that way if I were you,” he’d say. Or, “Lose ten pounds. Thank me later.” Finally of course he was killed.

It was the rainy season as we camped there, along with many other tribes: the McDermotts, Wilsons, and the gentle Mossengales among them. We were looking for some dry wood. Having determined that there was none, we were packing up and getting ready to head out when Wilson, leader of the Wilsons, asked for an audience with Rosenfeld the 2.



Wilson is a man who takes up much space in the world. Being head of one of the richest and most pillaging clans around, he lives a life of legendary hedonism. Coupled with a weight problem he’s had since birth, he has turned into a man so obese he can barely see from the sagging flesh. Even his face sags. His *forehead* is fat. That he can walk at all is a miracle.

Wilson approached and asked Rosenfeld the 2 to step away so they could talk in private. But Rosenfeld shook his head.

“What is said can be said in front of us all,” he said. “There are no secrets here.”

“As you wish,” Wilson said. “It’s the woman,” he said, gesturing toward Sally. A cloth had been placed over her head, but a strong wind blew it off. “She is more beautiful than any I have seen. I want her for my own.”

Rosenfeld – brave, heroic Rosenfeld the 2 – nearly laughed in his face. “You speak of her as if she were chattel.”

“Isn’t she? I’m willing to trade. Fair is fair. What would you like? We have many good dogs. I notice your dogs are all pathetic mongrels. Perhaps you would like some good dogs?”

Our dogs! Another man would have been buried to his neck in the sand for saying such a thing. But Rosenfeld held his temper.

“Our dogs?” Rosenfeld countered. “I can find no fault with them.”



"Oh please," came Wilson's riposte.

They went on like this for some time. Finally, Rosenfeld put an end to the quarrel. "There is no trading for Sally," he said. "Though I can certainly see why you would want her. She is more beautiful than the sunrise. But one day she will become the wife of my son, and together they will produce the next Rosenfeld."

At this, Wilson cruelly laughed. So did most of the members of our tribe.

"*Him?*" Wilson said, pointing to the just waking young Rosenfeld, who was at that moment yawning, and scratching his belly. "Do you really believe a child will come from such a union? Look at him. Is he not part monkey?"

"I should run you through with my stick for that," Rosenfeld said, seething.

Wilson laughed. "You would have to have a very large stick to run me through, Rosenfeld," he said. "Many men have tried, and all have failed. I am far too large for that."

"And not worth the effort," Rosenfeld said.

"Come now," Wilson said, his face turning red. "There is no need for this kind of discourse. Everything is for trade. All we have to do is set a price."

Rosenfeld turned, and attended to his packing. "I have spoken," he said. "I shall not speak again."

And at that, Wilson raised his arm, and suddenly we were surrounded by Wilsons galore, all bearing large sticks, and no mercy in their eyes. They were all terrible and huge. There was no doubt in my mind that this moment was very close to our last, so I tried to savor it. As they took their first step forward I looked around at the beautiful sky, at the mountains, and then, for a final treat, at Sally herself. *Kill me*, I thought. *I am happy*.

But it was she who saved us, just as we were all about to be obliterated.

"Wait!" she cried.

Wilson stayed his killers. There was a great hush.

Sally walked toward him. She got very close indeed. And she looked him over as you would an animal.

“Not bad,” she said, even though in my opinion it was plenty bad. “Not bad at all. But there is no way I could ever go with you and your band of callous warriors. Of course, you could take me, you could rip me away from my home tribe. But know I have a deal with the goddess Mordina, who gave me my beauty: if ever I was taken by a man against my will, I would lose my looks in an instant, and become the plainest woman there ever was.”

“I’ve never heard of Mordina,” he said.

“You will,” Sally said, “if you take me.”

Wilson shook his head. “Rats!” he said. “You have no value to me then. Kill them all!”



“But wait,” she said, stopping the onslaught yet again.

“Wait!” Wilson cried. “What is it?”

“It has always been my dream to be with the richest man alive. Are you not the richest man?”

“I am,” he said. “No one is even close! Come with me, O Lovely One!”

She turned away. “I would. But there is one more thing. One thing the man I will love must do for me.”

“Anything!” he said. “What is that thing?!?”

“That thing,” she said, “is a cartwheel.”

He stared at her for a beat. “A *what?*”

“The man of my dreams,” she said, “the man who I would go anywhere with – and do *anything* for” (wink, wink) – “is



not only the richest man in the world, but also a man who could, if he was asked, do a pretty good cartwheel.”

“A cartwheel.”

“It’s a deal-breaker.”

Wilson looked at her. He looked away. He thought about it. The crowd around him began to move away, bit by bit. Because you could tell: he was going to give it a try. All of him.

He held out his arms – each arm bigger ’round than me. His feet didn’t move, but his body seemed to sway on them, back and forth, picking up a kind of self-contained momentum. He looked at the ground, and the ground itself appeared to shudder as it considered the beating it was about to take. He took a deep, deep breath, and then –

Nothing happened at all. He didn’t move an inch. Thick streams of sweat poured down his face. He looked exhausted, as if perhaps the cartwheel was performed so quickly that no human eye could perceive it. It wasn’t that, though, but the opposite: the mere consideration of such an insane movement was all his body could withstand, and was in fact the limit of his skill in this specialized area of performance. For such a rich and famous leader, Wilson seemed at that moment beaten, humiliated, and pathetic. I would have laughed if he wouldn’t have killed me in an instant.

Sally shook her head. “Well, that’s too bad,” she said. “But like I said: no cartwheel, no me.”

She turned to go.

“But . . . wait,” he said.

“Wait?” she said, a smile playing on her lips. “Wait for what? I mean, look at yourself. I could wait here for years and you’d never do a cartwheel.”

And if I could have seen his eyes beneath the folds on his face I would say they must have

then hardened with resolve. His voice certainly did.

“I will,” he said. “Mark my word, one day I WILL do a cartwheel! And when I do, my little beauty, I will come looking for you, and you will be mine.”

She shook her head and laughed. “Mordina as my judge,” she said, “I will have you if you can.”

And on that day we were spared. Sally was not only beautiful: she was also cunning. I think everybody dreamed of her that night, one dream which was passed around like water, shared, and appreciated. But we quickly forgot about Wilson.

Our mistake.



**I should say more here about our tribe.** The Book says that our ancestors were hand-picked by Ono, god of all gods and of all things everywhere, of the seen and the unseen, above and below, left and right, on top and on bottom, forever and ever, to represent all of mankind, for there was talk in those times of the Overwith, the final days, so called because after them nothing would ever happen again: it would all be Over With. To this end a number of men and women were chosen, each person having his own special skill so that together every imaginable skill was represented. Thus, when the whole of humanity was wiped from the face of the earth there would

still be us, chosen by Ono, and we would be able to carry on, and bring man back to the world through a strategy involving rigorous mating rituals of which the less said the better. However, this was later revealed to be evil scheme cooked up by our lowly first leader, *Barth*, who had his own selfish interests at heart. Rosenfeld the 1 challenged and defeated him, and since then we have happily done whatever the Rosenfelds have told us to.

As tribes go, we're pretty small. Most tribes can count at least a hundred among their members, but the Rosenfeld tribe has always hovered around thirty. Some of the elders have died, and we've lost a lot of the younger men and women to other groups they find more exciting. We don't do a lot of pillaging, for instance, because the Rosenfelds never believed in it. But it goes without saying that pillaging can be a lot of fun, and if pillaging is what you're into you join the Smiths or the Wilsons. As always, we go along to get along, and at times it is a tedious and boring way of life. But there are advantages to it. I'm sure they will become apparent to me over time.

Like our ancestors, though, we have one of many things. We have a cook (Agatha), a scout (Franklin), a grower of things (Bob), a warrior (Big Akins), a stick collector (Jimbo), and Friendly Mary. Mary is not that friendly by nature, but by the time she came around all the good parts were taken. Roy, the half-man, is pretty much a jack-of-all-trades – and I of course am the scribe, which is a holy and vaunted position, though I am not sure if anyone else realizes this besides myself.

Finally, there is Sally. I don't know what to say about her except that there is no single thing in the world more beautiful than she. No man who sees her can reasonably be expected to control his desire. So it's hard to blame Wilson, really. Had I an army, I too would fight to have her. Alas, all I have is my pen. I wrote this little poem for her:

## To Sally

*How is it you're on this earth?*

*My bet's on a heavenly birth.*

*You slipped through a crack,*

*Now the gods want you back*

*They know best how much mirth you are worth.*

I'm not much of a poet. But beauty can speak for itself.

*She is too beautiful even to draw.*

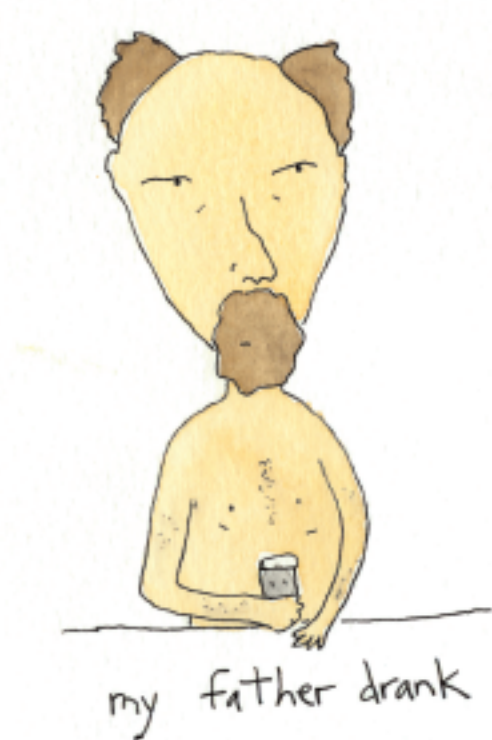
The days and nights come and go here in the Land Before the Cliffs, and as I write *O Great Rosenfeld!* again and again, making the ‘O’ a little bit bigger than the ‘G’ in ‘Great,’ and the tail of the ‘R’ in ‘Rosenfeld’ long and fancy, curling beneath the rest of the word like a base of



support, and then ending with a small glow around the tip, I think: it is not easy, being a scribe. My father told me it wasn't going to be easy and he was right. It is, in fact, a huge responsibility. Of course, most people don't get it. They don't understand. They think I've got it made, for I am never the one to chop down the tree, or to hunt the bear, or to gather the wild apple. I am the one who *writes* about the tree that was chopped, the bear hunted, the apple gathered. When there is a battle, do I fight, do I die? No. I am perched in a safe place, a good spot from which to watch someone get killed. I watch for a while, and then I write about it. When blood is spilled, when bones are broken, when tongues are nailed to trees (which has never happened to my knowledge, but if it did I would write about it), it is not my blood and it is not my bones: it is only my words. This may not always be so: Wilson and his marauding horde will no doubt kill us all. But to date, I have been busy reflecting, describing, embellishing. So automatically people think I'm not doing anything, just because I don't *do* anything, except write and, when the spirit moves me, draw (something new I've brought to the position).

It was always thus. I remember my father, exhausted after a long day of being a scribe, having to endure the taunts and jeers from people like Big Akin's father, Bigger Akins. "They have no idea," he said. "I'd like to see them come up with new and interesting ways to praise Rosenfeld. I'd like to see them invent an ancient myth right off the top of their heads. And people wonder why scribes drink."

My father drank. He took his job very seriously. Every word had to be the *exact right word*; he'd sit there for hours, thinking, talking to himself. "The . . . ferocious



boar charged . . .’ Not ferocious. I did *‘ferocious’* with the bear. The what boar? Murderous? Savage? How about simply, ‘The boar charged.’ The fact that he’s charging implies he’s not the sweetest boar in the world . . .”

It never really got any better. Every single day was like the very first day, he said. His mood could sometimes be dashed for days during the difficult parts.

“I’m no scribe,” he’d say, in despair.

Thank God for Mother. If not for her, he never would have written at all.

“You, not a scribe? Who described the sunset as ‘a burning orange falling from the over-arching branches of the sky’? Who wrote of Rosenfeld, ‘When he closes his eyes the world disappears’? You. You’re a scribe. You are THE scribe. Besides which, if you don’t write, they’re going to sacrifice you. You know it as well as I do.”

Certain death always turned out to be the motivation he needed to produce. My mother knew him well.



Because the truth is, my father was born to be a scribe. For we Ashburton-Mosbys are small, and somewhat shy, and not much good at leading, or fighting, or chopping, or hunting, or plowing, or building huts, or growing food, or any of the other things that are important to know how to do to be a member of this tribe, or any tribe at all. We’re scared of heights, of large groups of people, of most animals, and of green, leafy plants. But to live in the world we have to do something, otherwise Mother was right: when

sacrifice time comes around, who do you think is the first guy to go? An Ashburton-Mosby. So we picked up a talent and quick. It is said that when they were tying my grandfather to a tree as a sacrifice to the Great Beast, and Rosenfeld the 1 was tying the last knot, my grandfather slyly whispered in his ear.

*I can make you a god,* he said.

Rosenfeld the 1 paused in his tying.

*You what?* he said.

*I can make you a god. A flat clean surface and a piece of coal is all I need.*

*But I am not a god,* Rosenfeld the 1 whispered back.

*No,* my grandfather said. *Not yet.*

So in this way the first Ashburton-Mosby was allowed to live, and Rosenfeld the 1 became a god. His special provenance (for gods have particular powers and things they like to do, places

they like to be): tomatoes. Rosenfeld was god of the tomato, and each Rosenfeld thereafter has laid claim to the same.

Laugh, but it saved my grandfather's life.

Every man, no matter who, when or where, has to carry a load in the world. My job as a scribe - the load I carry, inherited from my father after Rosenfeld the 2 fell - is to watch how the rest of us hold up beneath the weight that wears them down, and with words describe what happens as they do this, in a way that others will one day read and understand. I think this is important. Because without words there is no magic,



and without magic no man could ever become a god.

Even of the tomato.

**News travels slowly through the forests, the mountains, and the fields.** By the time one hears of something that is happening miles and miles away, the chance is that it's already over, and that something else is happening in its place, which we will hear of, again, long after it is over. But when lone travelers stop by our camp on occasion, we gladly exchange food and drink for news of the world around us. Old news, ancient news, news that is completely made up – it's all the same to us. Just the sound of another voice brightens our lives, for no matter what is said we always hear the same thing: you are not alone. There are others in the world just as lost, others just as scared, others whose lives have no meaning beyond the bare fact of their own brief existence.

Some months after the confrontation with the Wilsons, one such wanderer found his way to our camp, a bearded man with hair as long as his arms, and we sat with him around the fire, and listened to the tales he told. Enfolded in darkness, he spoke to us.

“The things I have seen!” he said. “I saw a great fire inside a mountain, and out of the fire came the blood of the mountain itself, destroying everything in its path! A message perhaps from the god of the mountains, Zoratheia.”

“Actually, that's called a volcano,” Agatha said. “It forms when molten rock flows up from the mantle to the crust and bursts through cracks and fissures. The ‘blood’, as you call it – that's lava. Anything else?”

“Well, yes. I saw . . . I saw the sun go dark in the middle of the day! Nothing but the hand of a *god* could – ”

“Solar eclipse,” Agatha said. “Is that it?”





The bearded man with hair as long as his arm seemed depressed. "Tough crowd," he said.

"Go on, please," I said.

"Well . . ."

"Please."

"Okay. There was one other thing I found somewhat amusing," he said.

"We wait with eager ears!" Agatha said, sarcastically.

"I saw – maybe I won't tell you after all."

"Come on."

"Well –"

"I for one can't wait," I said.

"Okay," he said, relenting. "I saw a fat man doing cartwheels."

The laughter and the restless noise around us suddenly ceased. Everybody froze. We looked at the stranger, mute in fear and wonder. Then I stood and approached him. The firelight illuminated his bearded face as he hungrily gnawed on the leg of a bird.

“A fat man,” I said. “Doing cartwheels? Are you sure?”

He nodded.

“How fat would you say he was?” I asked.

“Pretty fat,” he said. “He was so fat, he could sell shade. No, really. He was so fat that someone planted a flag in him: they thought he was a New World! He was so fat – ”

“That’s enough. Tell us about the cartwheels.”

“The cartwheels. Well, they weren’t very good. They weren’t very good at all. But you could tell he’d been practicing. I spoke to him. He told me he used to be even fatter. Said his goal was to get down to about 180. Which, by my calculations, was about half of him. He had a ways to go.”

“Interesting. And did you happen perchance to catch the man’s name?” I asked, with hopeless trepidation.

“The fat man?” the stranger said. “Sure I did. It was Wilson. The fat man’s name was Wilson . . . .”

Rosenfeld the 2 was never one to run from certain death. He had in fact faced certain death many times and somehow always lived to tell about it. My father had to write down each and every near-death adventure, until it became quite tiresome and repetitive. *A bear on one side, a herd of hungry coyotes on the other, blood pooling at my feet, without a weapon of any kind – I knew this was the end for me. My last moments alive. Certain death. But then – the wind blew, a tree branch swayed within my reach, and I grabbed it, and was lofted up and away from my early*



grave . . . . Feature this times 1000 and you'll get the idea.

The point is that he was unafraid of certain death, but still, upon hearing of the encroaching Wilson, traveling across the countryside doing cartwheels, he made what everyone felt was a good decision: let's move on, he said. "We shall not run," he said. "For Rosenfelds never run! So let us walk. Let us walk very fast."

And we did. Perhaps this is why he failed to see the root that killed him. He was walking way too fast.

**Rosenfeld!** Great, great Rosenfeld! Mere sheets of paper cannot hope to contain the mag-

nificance that is you! It recoils as I insist on trying, tearing at the edges, crumpling up and cowering at the sight of my pen hovering above it. It knows it is not worthy place to record your exploits. It is too flat and plain!

And yet I speak to the paper as I would to a spooked horse, *Calm down* I say, *and let me write what I must, let me inscribe upon you and thus unto the communal memory of our tribe the sad day we said goodbye to your father.*

I have never known a sadder day and there are many who will say the same.

First, there was very little left of Rosenfeld the 2 to say goodbye to. The animals had worked him over pretty good by the time we found him, and even if they hadn't, the fall from the cliff - it was really steep - must have left him looking none too good by the time he hit bottom. So, he was mangled, then he was torn apart and eaten. What little we could find of him could fit into a leather pouch. And so this is where we put him, in a leather pouch.



But allow me to remember him as he was in life.

His shoulders were wide, thick like a tree. His beard long and flowing and full of bugs. In his eyes, the wisdom of the ages. His hands could crush a turtle's shell. And, for a big man, he was quite a good dancer. And yet he tripped over the smallest root and fell, and that was the end of him.

When the very first Rosenfeld died (bee stings), we put his corpse on a ship and pushed it out to sea, afire, flames licking at its sail and mast as it carried its heroic cargo into the setting sun.

Rosenfeld the 2 had hoped for more of the same, but we were miles from the sea and we had no ship. There was a small lake – a pond, really – not far from where we were camped. The half-man Roy skittered through the forest on the palms of his hands, searching for wood from which to make a little raft. Roy has skills a whole man would envy. No one can climb a tree like Roy. He can hide in small places. He's as fast on two arms as most men are on two legs. But



chiefly it's the way he carries himself through the world that's impressive: he makes it his practice to smile at least once a day, and he never says a bad word about anyone. This from a man who started out life with half of what the rest of us did. It's an example for us all.

He soon returned with several plank-like branches, and vines like twine, and there at the edge of the small lake we built the funeral raft, and then waited for the setting of the sun.

Of course, though this was a dark time for all of us, it was darkest for Rosenfeld's only

son, Rosenfeld. He had lost his father, and they had been very close in a quiet way. I once saw them skipping rocks across the surface of the water, just the two of them, and I was moved. It was hard to ask a man so deep within his own grief to become our leader in the matter of a moment.



The whole idea of it wore on him. He was beside himself.

"I am so not up for this," he told me before the ceremony began, pacing back and forth from one end of the regally thatched hut to the other. It was regal, but still it wasn't very big, so he couldn't pace very far in one direction before he had to turn and pace in the other.

"No one gets it, George," he said. "I'm no leader. I'm the ne'er-do-well. The prodigal son. The black sheep."

I nodded, and wrote, and had a thought which I dared to speak. "Yes," I said. "But in the absence of other sheep, O Great Rosenfeld, does color really matter?"

He nodded, but not happily. "There are no other sheep," he said.

He stopped pacing, and looked at me. "Are you writing all this down?"

I nodded.

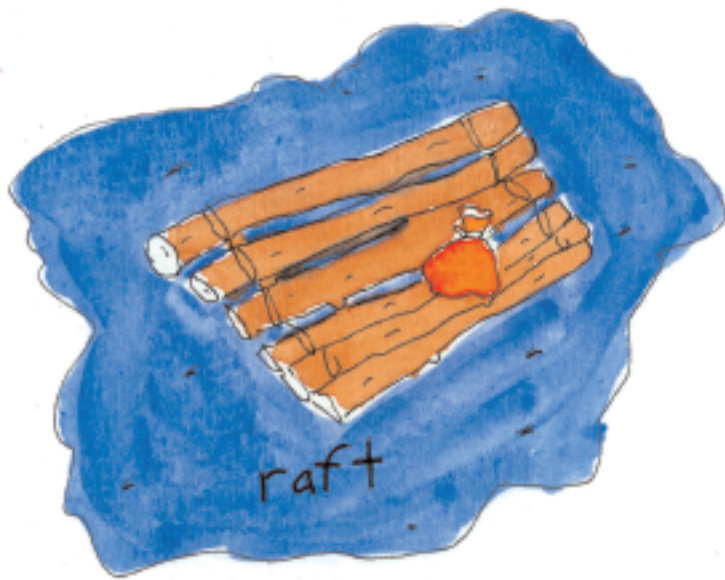
"Why?"

"It is my job, O Great One."

He sighed. "Please don't call me O Great One," he said. "Believe me, I'm not that great."

I was ready for this. "They say upon succession to leadership the spirit of every great leader who preceded you flies down from heaven and enters the body of the next, and thus within you now is Rosenfeld the 1 and the 2, which together with the 3 that is you makes you greater than anyone who came before."

He stopped pacing. "They say that, really?"



raft in the leather pouch.

It was beautiful, in the dying light, as we gathered by the side of the lake, and Rosenfeld spoke for the first time to the tribe he now led.

"This is a terrible day," he said. "My father, our great leader, is dead. Death comes to us all, of course, even to the greatest of us, except for those somehow granted immunity from it by the gods, and I have never met such a person, but only heard of their existence, somewhere in the world." He paused, looked around. "I doubt such a person actually exists . . ."



Sally, somewhat hesitantly, raised her hand. Everyone looked at her, pleased to have a reason to. Sally has long hair which in some light looks blonde, in others a sweet brown. She conforms in both face and form to the most ideal picture of womanhood you have in your mind. All the parts of her come together to make the most pleasing whole. I have already suggested that I would send an army to fight and die for her. As I don't have an army, it is probably closer to the truth to say that it is hard to look at her and not wish that she ask you to do her a favor. When I look at her, I think there is nothing

"Really."

He paused, considering it. "I thought I felt something," he said.

And it was thus that he answered the call, and he was able to get himself together, and as the sun set he led us all down to the edge of lake, where what remained of his father waited on the small wooden

I would rather do, nothing, than a favor for Sally. I speak for many men.

Rosenfeld saw Sally's hand. For a moment he just stared at her, blushing – he knew, as we all did, that Rosenfeld's father had always hoped for a union between the two of them. I admit somewhat painfully that this was a kind of joke within our tribe: Sally and Rosenfeld could not have been more different. Some said only a god would be good enough for her. "Sally," he said.

"Oh, well," she said, sort of laughing. "I met an immortal once." A great murmuring began all around. "At least, he said he was."

"Really?" Rosenfeld asked her. As if this didn't kill a little part of him. It did. I could see that. "What was he like?"

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "Very handsome, and strong. Hair that curled close to his head."

"A natural curl?" Rosenfeld asked.

She considered the question. "I think it was natural," she said. "Or perhaps it was another gift from the gods." She shrugged her shoulders, and smiled, lost in the recollection.

"So," Rosenfeld continued, "he was an immortal. How long had he lived? One hundred years? Two hundred? A thousand?"

"Eighteen," she said. "The immortal part had just started."

Rosenfeld nodded, sighed. "I see. Anybody else?"

There was no one else. Rosenfeld cleared his throat.

"So, as I was saying. Death comes to even the greatest of us," he continued. "Even to a Rosenfeld. Even – I'm sorry. Is it my imagination, or are the mosquitoes really bad down here?"

"We're at the edge of a lake at dusk," Big Akins insolently offered. "The mosquitoes are really bad."

"I thought so," Rosenfeld said, swatting at one. "I'm getting eaten alive" – which made us



think of his father, who, if he survived the fall (however doubtful) actually *was* eaten alive.

Rosenfeld began again. "So the great die –"

"You said that," Big Akins said.

"– and we who live on should safeguard their memory, hold it close to us like . . . like a little puppy, who just wants to play and . . ."

Apparently, between his grief and the mosquitoes, he lost his train of thought. He looked at me. I shrugged.

"Perhaps it's time to light the raft," I suggested.

He nodded. "And now it's time to light the raft, and, like the great warriors who came before him, give my father the send-off he deserves."



"Then dinner," Akins said.

Roy alone had remained beside the raft, beside a small fire, and Rosenfeld joined him there. The sun was almost gone now; you could just see a piece of it through the tops of the tall trees. Our shadows blended in with the encroaching darkness, as all 33 and a 1/2 of us took in this chilling moment, that of a son saying goodbye forever to the only father he will ever have. Despite the mosquitoes, Rosenfeld looked at the raft and the little leather pouch for some time. Who can say what he was thinking? Then he bent down and picked up the pouch, moving it this way and that, trying to find the spot on the raft where the pouch could rest to his satisfaction. And when he finally found the appropriate spot, close to the very center, perhaps a little to the left, he took a burning limb from the fire and placed it on the raft, then another, and then another, until the raft itself began to burn. Then, with a little push with both hands, Rosenfeld sent the raft and his father on their journey across the small lake, just as the sun finally died, and save for the splendor and

majesty of the flames which took our former leader from this world to the next, we were cloaked in darkness and filled with sadness. It was a sight to behold, and we beheld it, in silence, for about eight seconds.

"It stopped," Agatha said, her voice ringing out in the darkness.

"What?"

"The raft. It stopped."

And we looked, and she was right: it had.

"I think it hit the other side."

"It is a small lake," someone said.

"What should we do?" Roy asked.

But no one had any idea, so we just watched it for a while, resting against the far bank of the lake, until the grass there caught fire, and then a small tree, and as it was the dry season every branch and weed called to the fire *Burn me! Burn me!* And the fire answered *Yes!* And soon it was an inferno.

"Now we're all going to die!" Big Akins said. "Build a raft for us all and send us out into the lake, for a fire this size will ne'er be quelled, not by man!"

And yet then the water began to *roil*, as if the Great Beast Itself were rising from its depths, and a furious *splashing* occurred, and great waves of water reached out to the fire as if in combat, and



soon, save for the glowing embers of a few stubborn sticks, it was nearly dark again, the fire defeated, but not so dark that we couldn't see Rosenfeld, our Rosenfeld, completely soaked, waist-deep in lake water, looking down into it as if he had lost something there. And he had. He had lost his father.

Big Akins was right: no man could quell that fire. But – perhaps a god could. The God of the Tomato, the Great Rosenfeld.

**And so began the reign of Rosenfeld the 3 – in sadness and fear for our very lives.** We could feel his sadness, all of us, like a wet and dreary day, and it darkened the skies of our heart. This was in great contrast to the Rosenfeld we knew before. He had always been such a *happy* man – even, at times, perhaps, too happy. Which is to say he was perhaps overly eager to include the rest of us in some frivolity he choose to pursue, encouraged by drink and smoke and whatever he could get his hands on. If nothing was available, he would hold his breath for minutes at a time, inducing a state of remarkable giddiness – his natural state. There were many nights, as you were preparing for bed, Rosenfeld might burst into your tent dancing and singing, barely clothed perhaps, and ask only that you join him and his friends in some daring exploit or fatuous prank.

But all that changed as soon as he became our leader. The day after we burned his father, something about Rosenfeld changed. My father said it was ‘the mantle of power.’ He may have been right.

“I want to conquer something,” he told me.

“Sorry?” I said. I looked for a hint of his trademark ridiculousness, but it was nowhere to be seen. He was serious.

“I want to conquer something. Just to prove myself.”

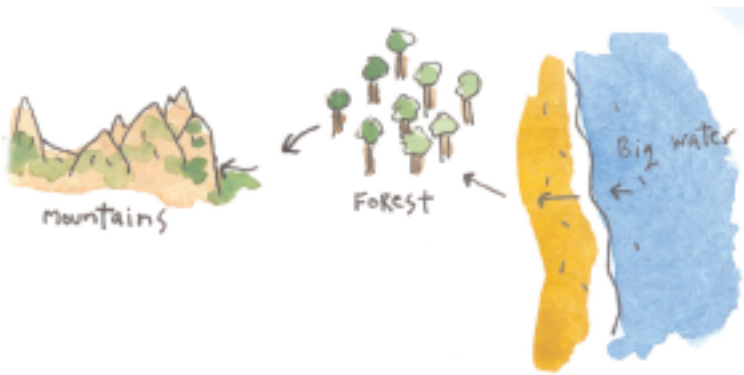
“Really?”

"Sure. Why not?"

"I don't know," I said. "I don't see conquering as your . . . calling. Not really. A small party might be more along the lines of – "

He shook his head. "There will yet be time for parties," he said. "I want to establish myself first. What was the first thing my father did upon ascension?"

"Let's see," I said, thumbing backward through the Book. "He sacrificed a sheep, drank its blood, wandered for three days in the wilderness, and came back with a vision, after which he led us away from the sea and into the forests, closer to the Faraway City."



Rosenfeld grimaced.

"Really?"

"Really."

"Well, I'm not drinking blood. End of story," he said. "I think my idea was better."

I thought about it. "Rosenfeld the Conqueror," I said. "It does have a ring to it."

"Thanks. Conquering things is good. Good for me, and good for the morale of my people. Nothing really big, though," he said. "I should start small, to be assured of success."

We were still camped not far from the pond where the remains of his father were now either ashes in the wind or food for the fishes. To one side: the cliff off of which his father fell. To the other: a lovely meadow full of sunflowers, rabbits, and butterflies. He pointed that way.

"How about that?" he said.

"What? The . . . meadow?"

"Yeah. The meadow. Just to warm me up, you know."

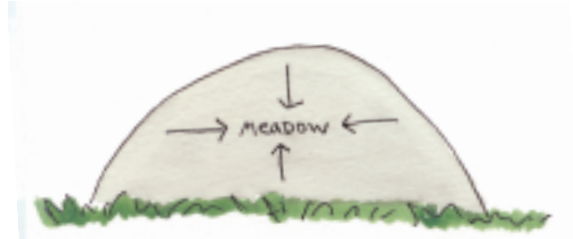
I sighed. I had no authority to oppose him. "Well, in that case," I said, "it sounds like a

very good idea."

And so it was that the next day he assembled our most fearsome warriors, an assemblage which included One-Eyed Jack, the half-man Roy, Agatha (who is strong for a woman), and of course Big Akins, the most fearsome warrior of them all.

Rosenfeld drew the battle plan on the side of a big rock.

"I want one of you at each corner of the meadow," he said, "like so. I will be behind this rock. At my



command, we – and by we I mean you – will rush into the fray, and without even a passing thought for your own well-being you will do what has to be done, whatever that might turn out to be. Take no prisoners. None. Those who survive will meet here, in the center of the meadow, by this very tall sunflower, where we will raise the flag of Rosenfeld."

There was a pause while we looked at him, mute. "The flag of . . . Rosenfeld?" I finally said.

And just like that, he spiraled into a sudden depression. "Don't tell me there's no flag," he said.

"I'm sorry, but I must tell you, there is no flag," I said.

"What?" he said. "I mean, I just assumed there was a flag."

"No O Greatest Wonder."

"Well . . ." He tried to hide it, but I could tell he was sorely disappointed.

"Perhaps we can make a flag," I said.

Rosenfeld brightened at the prospect. "Really? You think so?"

"I don't see why not."

"Something bright, happy? With a little red in it? Red is my favorite color."

"Oh for God's sake," Big Akins said.

"A happy flag with red in it. Consider it done."

"Great." He came back to the rock. "Okay then. Where was I? Oh, yes. Those who survive –"

One-Eyed Jack raised his hand. "May I ask a stupid question, O Great One?"

"You bet."

"What are we attacking?"



Impatiently, Rosenfeld indicated the drawing on the rock. "The *meadow*," he said.

One-Eyed Jack nodded. "But within the meadow. Once we get there. What do we do?"

"Well, that is a stupid question," he said. "Scared, are we?"

"No sir."

He fixed Jack with a stare. "Maybe I overestimated you, Jack-o."

"No sir."

"Maybe you're missing more than just an eye. Maybe you're missing your guts."

“No sir! I have guts sir. I am ready to fight for you and our group and completely . . . just completely kill whatever it is I find in yonder meadow.”

Rosenfeld slapped him on the shoulder.

“Good man,” he said. “And the rest of you?”

Akins spit. “Oh for God’s sake,” he said.

“Then go! Go and conquer something!”

### *The Battle of the Meadow*

Those who have ears should listen, and those who have eyes should read, for here I tell the tale of the Battle of the Meadow! A tale that will be told many times as warriors gather round a fire after a great fight, many bleeding, some nearly dead, body parts strewn about and so forth, as is the case in all great wars.

The Battle of the Meadow! Where, just before lunch on a Thursday, Rosenfeld the Conqueror waged his first great conflict and emerged – no surprise here, considering who led the troops into battle – victorious!



A leader of such magnitude that he didn't actually have to be there during the battle itself, but could instead lead at a *distance*, from behind a rock.

How many can say likewise? Not many, assuredly.

Thus under his command his four greatest warriors took their places at each corner of the meadow, and at his signal (his great voice screaming, “Three, two, one – go!”) they dashed through the many-flowered field, holding the biggest sticks they had, and rendered all who



opposed them completely dead, totally without life, each and every one, and met as planned in the middle of the field, where they planted the flag of Rosenfeld! And congratulated each other on a job well done.

And yet the Wilsons still are coming. The most vicious tribe of human beings ever assembled beneath the empty sky – they are coming to kill us. And there is a big difference between them and a small, empty field.

For one thing, they will not bring any flowers . . .

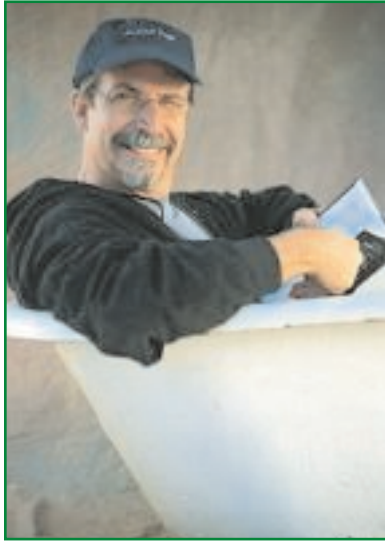
## **. . . a Story of Great Love and Bloodshed to be Continued in a Second Part, as Good if Not Better Than the First**

©2004 Daniel Wallace. All rights reserved.

The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal.

This Amazon Short has been permanently saved for you in your [Digital Locker](#).





## DANIEL WALLACE

### AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT

Daniel Wallace is the author of three previous novels: *Big Fish* (1998), *Ray in Reverse* (2000) and *The Watermelon King* (2003). In 2003, *Big Fish* was adapted into a major motion picture by Tim Burton. Wallace's works have been translated into 18 different languages, none of which he can read. He lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, with his lovely wife

Laura and his brilliant son Henry who recently turned 12.

This Amazon Short has been permanently saved for you in your [Digital Locker](#).

*Also by* DANIEL WALLACE

[The Watermelon King](#)

[Ray in Reverse](#)

[Big Fish](#)

This Amazon Short has been permanently saved for you in your [Digital Locker](#).