

Young Nelson and Old Nelson

Years and years ago in the Maracas valley there lived a magnificent bull. He was very strong and extremely vain. His legs were huge and the muscles in his shoulders were as hard as rock. His neck was large and powerful and under terrifying horns his great eyes flashed.

His name was Old Nelson Godon.

One day Old Nelson Godon decided that he should become king, thus relieving himself of doing any work at all, even foraging for food. The other animals would have to serve him and cater to his every need, and he could spend many leisurely hours cooling off in his favourite pool in the St Joseph River.

He decided to call all the animals together to make this announcement and, considering his size and strength, he had no doubt at all that they would accept his edict and serve him faithfully.

This was true of some of the animals, but when the forest animals heard what Old Nelson wanted, they were not agreeable at all. First of all, they did not want a king, and secondly, they felt that it was absolutely ridiculous for a non-forest creature to be their king. They had no objection to his lording it over the animals of the plains but they were the forest people.

“You want to be king?” the Tigercat said. “You can’t be king of forest animals. We know the forest as well as you know your fields and pastures. You are a creature of

the plains. Your home is not in the forest. How can you be our king?"

"I am stronger than any of you," Old Nelson Godon replied. "I can run you through with my horns."

"That may be true," the Agouti answered, "but strength is not all. With horns like yours, you could never run quickly enough through the forest to escape a foe."

"But I will never want to escape a foe," Old Nelson said. "Can you imagine anyone attacking me?"

A small, brown squirrel said, "That's all well and good for you to say, Old Nelson, but it takes a very small axe to cut down the largest Samaan tree in the forest, you know."

"That's true," the Boa Constrictor chimed in. "I am not one quarter as large as you are, Old Nelson Godon, but I am willing to bet that if ever I wrapped myself around you, it would be very difficult for you to get me off again."

Old Nelson was vain, but he was not stupid. He knew that the Boa Constrictor's way of dealing with his foes was to coil himself around them and squeeze with all his might until they were dead. He knew, too, that no amount of butting or trampling would make the Boa Constrictor loosen its coils, so for once in his life he said nothing, and the Tiger cat spoke again:

"I am sure that none of the forest animals would like to have a king," he said, "but if you want to be king, Old Nelson, go ahead. Be king of the cows, goats and sheep of the fields. You will have no subjects in the forest."

“Wait, wait!” called out one of the bulls. “No one has asked us whether we want a king, and I’m sure that we have no use for one. We are quite happy as we are now.”

“That is true, that is true,” chorused the others. But Old Nelson butted in, “You might as well stop talking,” he said. “If I want to be king, there is no one in this whole world who can stop me. And I have decided that from now on, from this very moment, that is exactly what I shall be. I am king of you all. Goats, sheep, cows, bulls, everyone must do my bidding or suffer for it. My horns are itching to punish those who disobey me. Kneel down, kneel down, and pay me homage.”

Since everyone was afraid to argue with him, they all knelt down, and Old Nelson Godon proclaimed himself king.

From then on, all the animals had to bow whenever he passed by, and Old Nelson settled down to enjoy being a monarch.

Everyone had to do his or her part to keep Old Nelson happy, but things were not too bad and although a few of them complained that the king was getting the best parts of everything, no one had the power to do anything about it.

Things continued this way for a long time but one day, as Old Nelson relaxed in his favourite pool and thought to himself how fortunate he was and what a great life a king lived, it occurred to him that he would like things to continue as they were forever. He saw himself as king for years and years, into what seemed to him eternity.

“Yes,” he thought, “that would be excellent. It

would be extremely pleasant to be always catered to and bowed to."

But then he thought of the young bulls that were growing up. None of them was as powerful as he now, but certainly one day they might be and then his crown would no longer be his. He was well aware that none of the others really wanted a king and that only his strength and the awe in which they held him were responsible for their acceptance of him as a monarch.

He thought and thought how to work this out and it was not long before he reached the conclusion that only total destruction of all likely competition could ensure for him an unending reign.

His wicked mind accepted this idea without a qualm and his only problem remained that of finding a way to carry it out.

Many days of thought and deep mumblings passed and finally he decided that from henceforth no one should look him in the face unless given permission to do so. The penalty for disobedience was death.

When the other animals were told of this they became quite distressed, because they reasoned it was impossible for them to minister to Old Nelson Godon's needs without looking at his face.

But the old devil knew this well enough and had actually planned on it. To make things worse, he made it even more difficult for the bulls by putting his face in the way as if daring them to look on it.

Well, frequently enough some young bull would do exactly this and when his eyes made four with the terrible blood-shot eyes of Old Nelson he would read his

death sentence in them. Old Nelson never failed to exact¹ the penalty and it was not long before he had killed all the young bulls. The old ones who were past their prime and of no danger to him he left alone but if a bull calf were born he made sure to thrust it through with his horns.

In this way he ensured the continuance of his reign and the constant fear and respect of his subjects.

Time passed and one day a cow due to give birth became determined to prevent Old Nelson from harming her baby should it be a bull calf. So early one morning she stole off into the forest. She went into the deepest part of the forest where she was sure Old Nelson would not follow her. Old Mr Boa Constrictor up in a tree saw her pass by and said,

“Good morning, Mrs Cow. Where are you going so early this morning?”

“I’m running away from Old Nelson Godon,” said the cow. “Please don’t tell him where I am. I feel that my baby will be a bull calf and when Old Nelson sees it, he will kill it. So please don’t tell him.”

“Go on, go on,” said the Boa Constrictor. “I will keep your secret and make sure that all the others follow suit. Don’t be afraid.”

Mrs Cow remained in the forest, and all the animals were kind to her.

Old Nelson missed the cow from the field and looked all over the place for her. When he did not find her he went into the forest, but he did not know his way about, so he asked the animals if they had seen the cow.

¹to exact = to compel payment of, to force out

Every animal he asked said, "No, Old Nelson, we have not seen the cow."

At last, however, the Tigercat dropped him a hint. "I saw your cow, Old Nelson," he said, "but I also saw Mr Boa Constrictor around at the same time. I can't remember seeing the cow since then."

When Old Nelson moved away, Mr Boa, who had been curled up in a tree listening to everything, called out to the Tigercat. "So, Tigercat, I have become a swallower of cows now, have I?"

"Well, you know," the Tigercat replied, "I was trying to get rid of him."

"I know that," Mr Boa said, "but take care in case you put ideas in my head."

After a few months a bull calf was indeed born to the cow and the birth became the best kept secret in the forest. Old Nelson never knew that a son had been born to him and was growing to maturity in the forest.

Years passed and the bull calf was no longer a baby but a huge, powerful bull, with horns as big as his father's. There was no difference in size between this young bull and Old Nelson Godon. His voice was so deep and powerful that sometimes when he roared Old Nelson would hear him and think it was the echo of his own voice coming back, and sometimes again when he stamped Old Nelson would feel the earth shake, and think it was his own stamping that shook it.

Young Nelson Godon was big and strong, but he wasn't what anyone would call a fighting bull. He was very peaceful and liked to lie on the grass smelling the flowers around him. He never picked quarrels, and

everyone thought him too gentle to hurt even a fly.

Mother Cow kept him safely in the forest. She told him how evil his father was and warned him never to go out of the forest. But as Young Nelson grew older, he also grew more curious about his wicked father and wanted to meet him. He pleaded with his mother to let him go. At last, on his sixth birthday, she said, "Very well, young man. I have warned you about your father. I will set you a task of strength. If you do it, you may go. If not, you must wait for six more years."

She took the young bull to a huge stone in the forest and said to him, "Do you see this huge stone? You must lift it with your horns and toss it into the air."

Young Nelson put his horns under the stone and heaved. The stone barely moved. He tried a second and third time, but the same thing happened.

His mother said, "See, you are not yet ready to meet your father. You are not strong enough. You must wait for six years longer, then we shall see."

At the end of six years, Young Nelson Godon again asked his mother to let him go, but she said:

"Come, let us do the stone test again. We shall see if you are ready."

This time Young Nelson had no trouble at all. He tossed it as lightly as he would a feather into the air. The stone went flying up into the sky, and the amount of earth that went up with it formed a great mountain.

At last Young Nelson Godon was ready to meet his father. His mother said to him, "Let us go."

When they reached within sight of the field where Old Nelson was, the young bull started to sing,

“Ol’ Nelson,
Ol’ Nelson,
Ol’ Nelson Godon!
No more shall reign,
But Young Nelson Godon!”

Old Nelson heard this powerful voice singing and calling his name.

“Someone is calling my name,” he roared. “Who dares to shout my name about the place?”

He came charging out of his pond into the pasture to see who was calling him. There was his son, standing firmly on his powerful legs, his long horns glinting in the sunlight. He looked the picture of strength.

For one fleeting instant Old Nelson was afraid. He paused, and with head lowered, he glared at the young bull. Young Nelson stayed still. The cows from the pasture gathered, shuttling around to see what would happen. All was silent. Old Nelson pawed the ground slowly with his forelegs.

Young Nelson sang again,
“Ol’ Nelson,
Ol’ Nelson,
Ol’ Nelson Godon!
No more shall reign,
But Young Nelson Godon!”

A powerful roar began in Old Nelson. All the way down inside him it started, gathering more and more strength until his huge jaws opened and his voice went thundering across the hills and valleys,

“Young Nelson,
Young Nelson,



Young Nelson Godon," he sang,
"No man shall reign,
But Old Nelson Godon."

With head lowered, not waiting for an answer, he charged. Young Nelson was taken by surprise. The old bull butted him so hard he shot up in the sky. But the cows in the pasture saw where he would fall and, dashing over to the spot, put their bodies together and caught him. Old Nelson, madder than ever now, rushed at him again. Three times he butted him into the sky, and three times the cows broke his fall.

The third time he came down Young Nelson was quicker. He got to his feet and spun around in a flash. He caught Old Nelson coming up on his fourth charge. The noise of their clashing horns resounded through the valley. Their hooves dug deep furrows in the earth. Young Nelson lifted Old Nelson on his horns and threw him in the air as high as Mount El Tucuche. When he came down the cows let him fall. Crack! His mighty horns broke!

The second time Young Nelson butted, Old Nelson shot up as high as the cloud which hung over El Tucuche, and again when the old bull came down the cows let him fall, and crack! His legs broke!

The third and last time Young Nelson butted, Old Nelson shot past El Tucuche, through the cloud and went way up into the blue sky until he almost disappeared. He took such a long time to come down that while he was on his way Young Nelson dug a grave into which he would fall.

Down from the sky came Old Nelson, falling, falling,

falling. Down, down into the grave he fell, breaking all the other parts of him and bellowing loudly at the top of his voice! And that was the end of the wicked, old bull.

Today there are hundreds and thousands of bulls all over the world, but any cow who cares to, will tell you that if Young Nelson hadn't fought Old Nelson there would have been no bulls at all.

Crick Crack!

- 1 Describe Old Nelson Godon. What is your opinion of him? Use as many of your own words as you can.
- 2 Give in your own words the argument Old Nelson Godon used when he was trying to persuade the other animals to elect him king. Also give the chief arguments which some of the other animals used against him.
- 3 Name a few of the privileges that Old Nelson Godon enjoyed as king.
- 4 Describe how the mother of Young Nelson Godon managed to save him from being killed by his father while he was still a calf.
- 5 After Young Nelson Godon developed into a powerful bull, we are told that there was no difference in size between him and Old Nelson Godon. He differed from him in other ways, however. Can you name a few of these?
- 6 How old was Young Nelson Godon when his mother decided that he was strong enough to meet Old Nelson

in battle? What made his mother sure that he was ready?

- 7 Write an account of the fight between Young Nelson and Old Nelson.
- 8 Of the four stories in this book, which one do you like the most?