

THE ANIMALS ALSO AWAIT HIS RETURN

by Christine Townend

They are standing on the distant hills and they fill the valley also. The zebra licks the coat of the tiger, and the pig leans lovingly against a dog. The swallow perches on the cat's head and the cricket sings to the frog. The assemblage of creatures spreads to the far horizon and fades into the stretched blue which has no edge, no cut to mark its finish.

They are standing, and they look expectantly towards the mountain to the East. The small brown eye of the elephant is blind now, from too much sun, but still his trunk is useful and he uses it to scan the air. And the deer, pressed together, balanced on springs, muscles forever rippling in readiness of flight, and the horse, his nostrils flared, and his mane floating, and his foot stamping the moss beneath, and they are all there, and all waiting, and they have waited, silently, patiently, with endless hope, for endless time. There is no killing among them. There is no hatred. There is no distress. There is simply the silent, persistent stare of knowing that something will happen, that they will be delivered.

They have come streaming in their millions, in files and columns, crossing the raging rivers and the trickling streams. They have come by hoof, trampling the reeds, or by stealth and by paw, treading silently the leaf-littered paths of the jungle. They have come from the desert, their great padded feet spreading over the ridges, their camel eyes wide and brown and lashed against the storms of sand. And the birds have come circling and soaring and calling in flocks and in ripples which stain the skies, they have come from the distant far air to alight on the trees on the hills which surround the valley where the creatures are waiting.

And then He is there, a column of light, a figure of white, and the turning and the tossing and the movement of the creatures is stilled by His hand which he raises in blessing. And from the hand extends an ark of dazzling light, a spectrum of colour, which streams like the downpour of waterfalls against the rocks so that the drops and the scatterings are spread around, and there is nothing which is not reached.

And then from out of the valley, from among the throng of creatures, a sheep emerges, the only movement, and the creatures watch as the sheep steps on her small neat hooves towards Him, and then, having reached his side, presses her head against Him, and He, with great attention and infinite compassion, extends His hand, so that it rests on the head of the sheep. And then a cow comes forwards, stepping on her cloven hooves, and stooping her head, and extending her wet muzzle, from which the rough tongue licks His hand which lies upon the head of the sheep. And then the lion in tightened step, proud and straight, emerges from the throng of creatures, and purring gently, lies at His sandalled feet.

And the tortoise crawls slowly, and the great elephant lays his trunk on His shoulder, and He stoops and lifts the small pup into His arms.

And then, the million calls of the million creatures fill the air, and the whole world reverberates with their rejoicing, and the grunts, the songs, the neighing, the chirping, the roars and the moos and the orchestra of voices swells and rolls beyond the mountains and over the seas, and across the deltas, and coasts, and islands, and continents until the whole world is filled with the triumph of the unity of the creatures. And the valley is filled with the tribes of humans and the city people and nomads, and herdsmen and slaughtermen and whalers and the fishermen and they fall on their knees before the congregation of animals.

And then there is the peace which passeth all understanding, because the violence between the kingdoms has finished. And this is how it will be.



Christine with a rescued dog —
Help In Suffering, Jaipur, India, 2007

Christine Townend is an Australian-born novelist, author and artist. Her first novel, *The Beginning of Everything and the End of Everything Else*, was published by Macmillan in 1975. Awarded a Literature Board Grant, she travelled to India where she met a spiritual Teacher in Pondicherry. Since then she has had eight other books published, as well as a biography by journalist John Little (Macmillan 2006). (continue)

In 1976, Christine founded Animal Liberation in Australia. In addition to campaigning for the rights of animals, she published three books on the subject: *In Defence of Living Things*, *A Voice for The Animals*, and *Pulling the Wool*. In 1990 she retired from Animal Liberation to live and work in Jaipur, India as a volunteer at Help in Suffering animal shelter, along with her husband Jeremy, a lawyer.

After a 3-month retreat in Mt. Abu, India, in 2000, Christine wrote a book entitled *The Hidden Master*, about her interaction with her spiritual Teacher, Vimala Thakar (which has also been published in French). A further book, *The Teaching of Vimala Thakar*, has been published in French and is soon to be published in English by Motilal Banarsidass, India.

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