

PUPPYLOVE: ANIMAL POLITICS

AN UNPUBLISHED NOVEL

By Anne Innis Dagg and Alan C. Cairns

Introduction

Dear Reader,-

The episodes which follow may strike you as bizarre, ridiculous, as imagination verging into hallucination. But the events take place in the year 2010. The everyday life of today's world is poor preparation for comprehending the future.

Earnest sovietologists proved completely incapable of predicting the breakup of the Soviet Empire. And what anthropologist would have predicted, fifty years ago, that a Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples would recommend the official recognition of 60 to 80 Aboriginal nations within Canada? Yogi Berra said it best: Prediction is always difficult, especially when it deals with the future.

But these cautions should not stop us from seeing hints of the future all around us. The idea of having Animal Representatives in the Canadian House of Commons is, in a sense, in the nature of things. Jeffrey Masson describes the emotional side of animals so cogently in his book *When Elephants Weep* that he drastically reduces the perceived gulf between animals and humans.

From another perspective, sociobiologists (or evolutionary psychologists) seek to find explanations for human behaviour in animal dispositions that humans have inherited during their evolution.

As humans and animals have come closer together in these two movements, many would argue that animals should have their interests more directly present in the legislature. After all, as humankind increases its control over nature, one consequence is the extinction of many species of animals and the destruction of habitat for others.

Recently, many humans in the Western world have developed (and none too soon) a special bond with the natural environment which they have come to see as vulnerable to the rapacious actions of other human beings. The advocates of animal representation argue that their absence from the House of Commons is just as harmful to them as the absence of women was for women, or prior to that, the absence of those without property for the poor.

Yes, we admit the Representation of Animals is a greater leap forward than any previous change in representation. For one thing, animals couldn't vote, and obviously they couldn't argue their own case in the House of Commons. These criticisms are countered by the assertion that simply having a number of animals strategically located in the Commons chamber would be a constant reminder to their fellow speaking and voting members that there is a truly "silent majority" of animal Canadians who should enter into their policy calculations.

The movement to have animals represent themselves sprang from

a coalition of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. First nations were mindful of the stories their elders told them about their people's empathy with both the animate and inanimate environment. Privately, they also appreciated that this would distinguish them from the majority Canadian society. After all, it was not they (they argued) whose destructive clearcutting of forests, overfishing, and environmental pollution had reduced the animal population. Also, they knew that a heavy price was attached to NOT being represented in the House of Commons; they had only had the vote themselves since 1960.

The non-Aboriginal partners in the movement, motivated as much by a sense of guilt as by empathy with the animal kingdom, contained the usual number of activists -- any cause that fed their sense of ethical purity deserved their support. Before long, their organizational skills put them in positions of leadership.

The tactic which would prove to be most fruitful came from the Puppyloves who lived in Alberta. Henrietta Puppylove had for long resented that the suffragettes had achieved their goals before she had a chance to shackle herself to iron railings in Ottawa. One Sunday she had gone to watch and support the Gay Rights Parade in Calgary. She felt a certain queasiness over the display of human flesh flaunted to shock the fundamentalist right, but any symbolic attack on the status quo -- words that were for her the very definition of evil -- fed her revolutionary fervour. She went home and discussed the parade with her vegetarian daughter, Jennifer, who had spent the day washing her dogs' kennels.

Jennifer had a brilliant idea. "Mummy," she said, "Why don't we have an Animal Pride day with a parade featuring as many animals as want to take part?"

"Why would they want to take part?" asked her mother.

Jennifer was stumped for a minute. "Well," she said at last, "We could have food arranged for them so they'd want to take part. Of course, that's only because they probably won't understand the bigger picture."

"Wonderful," agreed Henrietta. "You're a chip off the old block. I'll bring the idea up next week at the Friends of Women Politicians meeting. The Archbishop's wife is a member, and that prominent feminist sociologist from the University of Calgary. They both have cats."

Two years later, the first Animal Rights Parade took place in Calgary, widely and favourably reported around the world; it was a welcome change on the television nightly news from disasters and wars in foreign countries. The parade was mostly made up of domestic animals munching and relaxing on glamorous floats, but some wild crows and seagulls and three raccoons who relished food scraps also

participated, as did a few well-mannered bears and elephants. Many families lined the main street, their children delighted to see so many animals. Everyone agreed they should do it again.

Two years later, similar parades, all bigger and better than the original, were summer features of all the major cities across Canada except for Hamilton which had a recalcitrant mayor.

Two years after that (and after the Hamilton mayor had been voted out of office), scarcely a capital in the Western world and in India was without its local version of parading, prancing animals, marching school children, and brass bands. Signs proclaimed that full rights to membership in earth's society should no longer be restricted to human beings.

It's true that a number of the supporters of animal rights were disturbed by these parades. One petition in Moncton, New Brunswick, stated that such parades exploited animals in the same way as circuses had done. It attracted 4,000 signatures in less than a week; (letting animals themselves mark the petition, although logical in theory, had been rejected for practical reasons).

However, the growing popularity of the biannual animal parades silenced the dissenters. That the parade animals were being humiliated by their public exposure to gawking eyes was belied by the exuberant joy of the tailwagging dogs, lively piglets, light-hearted sheep, active geese and the few wild animals, usually dancing bears and chipper elephants. To the Puppyloves, it seemed that the animals sensed that their public appearance was an occasion for pride similar to that of Gays and Lesbians in their yearly gala. Animal enthusiasm was of course also stimulated by the rollicking bands of music and lavish portions of their favourite foods. By this time the festivities had so bolstered the cause of animal rights that several politicians, well aware of the many millions of voting Canadian animal lovers, began to speak of non-human animals as fellow Canadians.

Eight years after the first Calgary parade, this identification, which had entered the language of everyday life, led to the proposal that they should be represented in the House of Commons. A minority Liberal government gave Amanda Best, a Member of Parliament for Cougar Falls, Ontario, and an ambitious back-bencher, her opportunity. She was to propose the establishment of an all-party committee to explore the feasibility and desirability of bringing animals into the House. The committee report recommended that a short-term pilot project be set up with six animals, drawn from different parts of the country, present in the House during daily sessions. (A minority suggestion, which recommended their presence on committees, was rejected as premature when the House subsequently voted positively on the committee's proposal.)

(Although it was not mentioned in the report, the Bloc Quebecois member, Claude Casse-Tout, had informed journalists that an independent Quebec would have ten animals in its House who would also enjoy *full membership* on all committees. When pressed to explain what he meant by full membership, he begged off, stating that a task force headed by the aging Jack Parizeau was still in the process of developing a constitution for an independent Quebec. "The constitution in the Latin manner," he had smirked, "will be detailed and comprehensive, as far removed from the unwritten British constitution as can be imagined.")

Bureaucratic details such as how the animals were selected, where they would stay, and who would look after them, were left to a small managerial Animal Representative Committee of the House, chaired by Amanda Best.

When a senator proposed that the Senate should also have animal representation, and represent many more animals than the House of Commons, the press had a field day. The Honourable Senator had declared in apparent seriousness that once a dozen animals were present in the Senate, it could proudly claim to be far more representative of Canadian subjects than the elected House. However, several journalists commented that non-speaking animals would be indistinguishable from the many non-speaking senators. Geordie Truthteller, a columnist for the *Ottawa Probe* (who liked to imagine that Probe stood for Probity), observed that the animals' attendance record would undoubtedly be superior to the senators'. When some senators began to fear that the presence of animals would result in a lowering of their status and reputation, the proposal was quietly dropped.

Amanda Best, too, showed some ambiguity in her approach. Prior to her involvement in Animal Right issues and becoming chairperson of the management committee, she had displayed all the normal characteristics of speciesism, publicly labelling opponents she despised as "donkeys" or "jackasses." The candidate of the vegetarian party who had run against her she satirically labelled the "chickens' chum" and the "cows' crony", in contrast to her own concern and empathy for real people. Truthteller commented in the newspaper that never before had he seen new principles so quickly and passionately and, he speculated, so insincerely adopted.

"I'll be watching her," he informed his readers.

The committee had soon handled all the practical matters in its terms of reference: animals were selected, transported to Ottawa and given clean bills of health by a veterinarian, a barn was constructed to the right of the House to accommodate them, food specific to each species was ordered where possible in bulk from suppliers, and the animals' daily transport to the House and back had all been arranged

by the middle of August, 2010.

In reporting this experiment in animal representation in Canada's parliament we, as is ever the case, have had to make hard choices. Logically, perhaps, we should have provided more of the animals' perspective on what happened. Were they honoured and delighted by the increased sensitivity to their needs and desires? Or possibly simply anthropologically bemused by the antics of the tribe of MPs? Occasional angry thoughts of "too little and too late" possibly flickered through the mind of the first bison member of the House as he recalled the buffalo slaughters of the early contact period. We have left answers to such questions to another day; the acronym FRIN (further research is needed) is appropriate. Accordingly we have applied for funding for a follow-up study. We hope to publish our findings in the next few years.

We have toyed with concentrating on the House of Commons itself. Was it a kinder, gentler House from the animals' perspective? Did a 'we' group emerge in which animals and humans came to think of themselves as 'one'? In other words, was speciesism thrown into the dustbin of discarded prejudices? Were the animals more attracted to one of the parties? Did they think of themselves as being on the radical protest side of the party spectrum and thus with links to Reform, although Reform was now long in the tooth, and had little more allegiance to its founding principles than did the members of the Bloc Quebecois have to theirs. Indeed, several years prior to the arrival of animals in the House, the Bloc had privately indicated -- with leaks to the press -- that it would not campaign for the 'Yes' forces should the Prime Minister Lucien Parizeau claim that 'winning conditions' were on the horizon. The cynics had a field day at the time, although some of them agreed with the Bloc that six referendum defeats were more than enough. A leaked memo from the Bloc research bureau had suggested more personal motivations with its reputed assertion that Bloc MPs would only campaign for a clean break to independence pure and simple if the party could continue to send MPs to Ottawa -- from the nationalist perspective they could be thought of as ambassadors. (An imperfectly blacked out paragraph hinted that MP pension considerations were uppermost in their minds.)

Such considerations convinced us that a focus on how animals and humans adapted to each other in the House might provide material for an Op Ed piece in the press, but could not keep our interest alive for the novella we were hoping to write. In any case, the experiment was too short for any definitive assessment to be made.

Our focus then is on the small group of no more than a dozen key players in this remarkable experiment. We quickly discovered that these leading players were a typical mix of enthusiasts, poseurs, hypocrites, movement groupies, cause-seekers, and hangers-on that

willy-nilly emerge when attempts are made to nudge us all -- animals included -- in new directions.

Our focus on this melange of human actors in all their contradictory diversity and motivations did not leave us with despairing cynicism. Instead, we concluded that few good policies would see the light of day if they were not supported by the half-hearted and the self-seeking as well as by the true believers. Also, we expect public life to provide us with high quality entertainment -- to, among other things, feed our voyeurism. We can empathize with every one of the flawed saints and well-intentioned sinners in the following pages. We hope that you can too.

Cast of Main Characters

Jennifer Puppylove, an attractive blonde aged 20 who has devoted herself to various animal rights movements since reading Robin Lion's *Attack on Speciesism* in high school, is a good example of how identity and behaviour can flow from a surname. She combines naivete, born of her idealism, with political shrewdness that she has learned from her father.

Amanda Best, a back-bench Member of Parliament of the minority Liberal Government, sees the defence of animal rights as a vehicle to advance her political career. She replaced Jennifer's father as Liberal MP eight years ago in the Cougar Falls riding near Thunder Bay; if she hadn't won, she had planned to switch to the Reform party.

Claude Casse-Tout is an elected Bloc Quebecois member of the House of Commons now in his fourth term who no longer has much belief in the goal of Quebec Independence. Detecting his diminished zeal for the Separatist cause, the party leader has placed him on several peripheral committees, including that of Animal Representative Committee (ARC).

Henry Marx has been the only New Democratic Party Member of Parliament from Prince Edward Island since his initial election in 2001. Like many NDP members, he has lost his faith in the proletariat coincidentally with the dwindling members of the latter losing their faith in the NDP. Unable to live without a cause, he has shifted his support from human to animal crusades.

David Wrong, a Reform Member of Parliament from Alberta and past president of the Alberta Association of Big Game Hunters, like other Reform members opposes the adoption of a policy of Animal Representation by the House.

Ben Canterng Caribou is a Metis from Alberta well known for mobilizing votes among his people and for extracting money from the federal government. His appointment as Keeper of the House Animals was strongly backed by his long-time friend David Wrong.

Rosa Riel-Dumont, who married Ben three years ago, is the mother of his two children and a worried partner in their fragile relationship. Keeping her maiden name was both a feminist statement and an indication of support for the Metis nation; Ben tolerates the latter but is uncomfortable with the former.

Astrid Superville is the dissatisfied owner of a high class Perfume and Cosmetics Boutique in Ottawa. Her dream is to be in the limelight, if possible as a television personality.

Geordie Truthteller writes a daily column for the Ottawa Probe which combines malicious gossip and sarcastic analysis in varying proportions, a highly popular recipe. The creation and subsequent activities of Amanda's committee provide him with ready material should nothing else catch his cynical eye.

Harry Punchup, with his nightly program on community television, views himself as one of democracy's teachers; his no-holds-barred interviews with politicians and other celebrities give him extraordinarily high ratings.

The Experiment Begins

At first, there was some quibbling in the House of Commons, as there always is when change is underway. By the third week of the animals' introduction, however, they had lost much of their novelty. The cod's tank had been placed next to the Minister of Fisheries, who seemed as fish-friendly as anyone in the government which isn't saying much. She represented the Atlantic provinces. The cod seemed interested in the activity around her, swimming in quick circles when the members beat their desks with their hands, and settling down to the floor of the tank when a long speech was delivered. The Minister was unsure if the cod could actually hear what was said, but then she would not have understood much anyway, the whole fishery topic being so confusing. At first the back benchers behind the cod's tank grumbled because they had to go up adjacent aisles and around the back of the House to reach their seats, but soon they got used to this. Some even dropped bits of bagel left over from their lunch into the water.

The beaver, representing Ontario and even to some extent most of Canada and Canadian history, had a low pen set up beside the venerable Sheila Copps, who had more room beside her desk than did the back benchers who also had complained at first about this blocking of the aisle. He usually sat phlegmatically during the session, licking his paws sometimes, and sometimes shifting his position to face partly right or left; his heavy tail was too long to lie out straight behind him without hitting the rise of the stairs against which the pen was placed.

The grizzly bear from British Columbia had settled in well beside Svend Robinson, usually sprawled sideways on the aisle stairs. The Humane Society had complained at first that someone might get hurt by a bear, but Amanda Best had located a placid young male who had been orphaned as a cub and raised by a couple near Smithers. Indeed, Robinson often leaned over to stroke the bear during Question Period when he became upset by the shouting and banging of the members. Sometimes the bear dozed, but usually he glanced about with interest as various members rose to their feet to speak. On his first day in the Commons he had stood up and urinated when one of the Reform members was asking a complicated question about multiculturalism; this caused a flurry of excitement as Robinson and his neighbours shifted in their seats to avoid the splashing urine and wondered what to do. Soon Robinson had arranged for a series of adult-size diapers

to form a soft cushion for the bear and for the other animals to lie on, and that worked well.

The young harp seal, captured near Baie Comeau by animal rights activists before she could be clubbed to death for her fur, was in a low pen similar to that of the beaver. However, the pen had no permanent resting place; instead it worked its way from day to day up and down the aisles where the Bloc Quebecois sat. Some members who refused to have the pen near them insisted that a seal could not possibly represent the fauna of Quebec, largely because the species had been chosen by the Animal Representative Committee which had an English majority. Others disliked the seal connection because it did not significantly correlate with the history of French Canada prior to the "conquest". However, some Quebecois made much of her, symbolizing as she did, they pointed out to various journalists, an animal that was abused during the hunting season mostly by English-speaking sealers.

The prairie provinces were represented by a young bison, one who had broken his leg near an Alberta ranch and become tame while being cared for by a Metis woman. He lay in the aisle among the Reform Party members seldom shifting his position, perhaps for fear of bumping his nearly healed leg on the aisle stairs. He was an intense animal, looking solemnly at each speaker in turn and always puzzled by the chaos of Question Period.

The final new symbol was a wolf, representing the north, who looked enough like a dog to be a general favourite. Indeed she had been raised with a team of huskies when her mother had been shot by a bounty hunter. The Prime Minister usually persuaded her to sit by him with pieces of bologna which he slipped to her when attention in the House was focused elsewhere. During Question Period, when he was at a loss for an answer, he liked to lean over and pat her on the head; to his mind, this not only bought him time to think, but showed that he loved animals and was a strong proponent of the north. Since the attention of the wolf could be bought with food, gradually she became fatter as Reform and NDP members lured her to their area when television cameras were operating. Many photographs of the wolf had appeared on television and in newspapers, licking the hand of someone who had had tuna for lunch and who wanted approbation from his constituents back home, or looking up attentively at a speaker who had thoughtfully put a hamburger in his breast pocket.

The presence of the animals was already affecting the behaviour of the Members of Parliament. Some lost their train of thought when they glanced around while in a flight of oratory to find themselves looking into the eyes of an attentive grizzly bear. No one had yet embarked on a speech about the environment, realizing that the implications of their comments had to be thought out carefully, now

that there were wild inhabitants of various Canadian regions actually present to seem to assess their ideas. In the House of Commons restaurant more members were eating vegetarian meals, although a die-hard group made a point of ordering and flaunting large rare steaks to indicate their displeasure with the House animals. One Reform member, David Wrong, went so far as to demand special orders of buffalo meat made up into stew and burgers, but this was thought by most members to be going too far. The animals themselves seemed interested in their new occupation, and comfortable in the large Barn which had been erected to the right of the Parliament Buildings on top of the hill where the shelter for stray Ottawa cats had been thrown together years earlier. Their keeper, Ben Canterling Caribou, rounded them up after each sitting of parliament to take them to the Barn, and brought them back early the next morning before the Members arrived. Some journalists queried how equality of human and non-human individuals was achieved when the latter were confined to a barn, but Amanda explained that the individuals were especially chosen because they were unable to look after themselves in the wild. This wasn't necessarily true, but it sounded good.

Ben himself was a Metis cowhand and an anthropology graduate of Athabaska University who owed his appointment as keeper to David Wrong, his Member of Parliament. Ben had a great deal of influence among the Metis in Wrong's riding; he had delivered the Metis vote for the Liberals and the NDP in previous elections, depending upon the issues given priority (the future of the wood buffalo in the nearby National Park, anti-workfare etc) but most recently to the Reform (mineral rights on Metis land, settlements in northern Alberta). Wrong wanted to show Ben gratitude for the past, but mostly to guarantee his support if possible for the future. In addition, David wanted to keep tabs on what the Animal Representative Committee he opposed was up to, since there were no Reform members on it.

The post Ben held as keeper, according to Civil Service job specification and pay scale, technically required a PhD in zoology. Wrong, however, who shared the Reform criticism of credentialed academics, managed to convince the Civil Service Hiring committee that Ben's wide-ranging experience as trapper, hunter, and cowhand was equal if it did not surpass the book-learning of the ivory-towered who couldn't ride a bronco to save their life. David had subtly reminded the committee that the Metis were increasingly unhappy with their underrepresentation in the Aboriginal civil service quota.

Amanda Takes Charge

When the news had first spread in the summer of 2010 that Canada was introducing animals into its House of Commons in an effort to increase inclusivity for Canadian subjects, the international press

had had a field day. There was talk of legislation being enacted by Canadian coots and wily weasels, and alliterative jokes about Meech and moose.

But when Liberal member from Cougar Falls, Amanda Best, the driving force behind this unlikely transformation, was interviewed, the change made sense. At least it made sense rationally.

"Two hundred years ago Europeans were exterminating the Beothuk natives of Newfoundland because they didn't think of them as human," she would state in her frequent speeches. "Eighty years ago, women didn't even have the vote. They were considered chattels under the law. Now we have respect for all different kinds of people -- homosexuals, Asians, midgets." (There was a stir about her choice of examples in Letters to the Editors of newspapers across Canada, but Amanda never retreated, so she continued to use these three examples in all her many speeches; it became a ritual for some listeners to boo and others to applaud when she reached this part of each talk, which gave her even more publicity than she would otherwise have had.)

"Obviously the next group of beings that must be included in the category of Canadians are the animals that live in Canada. They can't have a voice -- at least they can't speak -- so that appropriation of voice by humans is essential even if politically incorrect. However, we can make sure that their perspective is considered in the laws we make. What better way to ensure that this is done than to have actual animals present among us? Can we really make laws that will decimate the cod population when there is a cod right in our midst? Or allow seals to be butchered on the ice when there is a seal watching us?"

The new look in the Commons had taken place quite suddenly. Animal rights groups had been urging for years that care be taken of the environment and of the animals that live in it, but no one had paid much attention to them before Amanda Best had set out on her activist crusade.

She herself had been galvanized by a whistle-blower's report of what became known as the Tailless Beaver Incident, the TBI. Of course the whistle-blower had lost her job at her university, but the incident gained huge public attention.

A medical researcher had begun an experiment in which he had cut off the tails of ten beaver -- three males, four females and three young, in order to study phantom pain that exists when the brain registers pain in an appendage that is no longer present. This has been documented countless times by amputees. The experiment had been passed by the university's Animal Care Committee even though the rationale had been badly flawed.

"How can you register the pain the beavers feel?" the reporter

who broke the story for *Saturday Night* had asked the researcher.

"It's easy to see their discomfort," he replied. "But our experiment is much more complex than that. We're going to run CAT-scans of the beavers' brains. Our analysis will be the first time that brains of living beaver have ever been studied in such detail." He had apparently smiled proudly as he spoke.

"Why beaver?" the reporter had asked, looking doubtful.

"Why not? The beaver is a Canadian animal. We need to know more about it. Anyway, I had beavers left over from another experiment on temperature control in their tails. Some of their tails were frost bitten, so it seemed a good idea to take them off entirely. And rather than waste the beavers, I decided on the phantom pain experiment. I have a large government grant so there's no problem about money. We want to make the world a better place for amputees," the researcher concluded.

"Why not just study phantom pain in people?" the reporter had insisted.

The researcher rolled his eyes. "We can't do experiments on people," he replied. "It's unethical. Besides, clinical experiments are far more expensive than animal studies."

When the issue of *Saturday Night* which contained the Tailless Beaver story appeared, newspapers across the country took it up. Editorials raged against such insensitivity. Readers were incensed that taxpayers' money was being spent for such pointless research. Journalists began snooping through descriptions of other experiments funded by the Medical Research Council of Canada and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council. They found a study in which seals were hit with sealing hooks to see how long it took for them to die; this project was called The Humane Seal Inquiry. Another expensive study involved killing 5,000 meadow voles so that their skulls could be extracted, cleaned and studied along with their skins to determine the number and range of meadow vole subspecies across Ontario and Quebec; ten graduate students were involved in this project which lasted for eighteen months, including two summer trapping seasons. A student activist suggested to the chief investigator that this seemed like a waste of money, but the investigator had answered sharply that similar research on the white-footed mouse had involved 27,000 dead bodies, so that really his study was a bargain, and he only hoped that he hadn't been too parsimonious in the number of voles carcasses needed.

Most Canadians were outraged as information about such research hit their newspapers day after day, but none more vocally than Amanda Best. She had decided to make the condition of Canadian animals her *raison d'être* for being in the Commons; she had become bored with being one backbencher of many, and wanted a challenge that would bring

her prominence and make Canada a better place to live in. She got in touch with the animal rights group in her riding of Cougar Falls (mindful in part of the publicity she would give to her town's name) to seek its support, which the members were delighted to give. One faction suggested that she also take on the cause of factory farm animals whose dreadful living conditions they had painstakingly catalogued in an ambitious report, but when she discussed this with her colleagues in Ottawa, they said that abuse of farm animals wouldn't fly. Too many people liked to eat meat. Amanda had decided her focus would have to be on wild animals with whom people were more likely to empathize.

The First Committee Meeting

Amanda Best was the last person to arrive at the Commons Barn for the meeting of the Animal Representative Committee. They were to discuss a private member's bill centred on the proposed Wildlife Corridor running from Yosemite Park to the Yukon, the Y2Y. The group had gathered in the Keeper's Room of the Barn which had a large indoor window looking out on the barn's interior where the House animals spent their spare time while not in the House. The builders had originally installed a one-way window so that the keeper could watch his charges from his room while he ate or rested or wrote up endless reports, but Ben Canterling Caribou had changed that. He had insisted that if all were equal, there should be a two-way window so that the animals could also see what the people were doing.

On this late September afternoon, four of them sat on hard chairs around Ben's table discussing ways to inject Y2Y enthusiasm into the House. Henry Marx, a middle-aged bachelor with a small mustache, was a New Democratic Party member from Prince Edward Island. Claude Casse-Tout, together with his wife Gabrielle, was an ardent bird watcher and member of the Bloc Quebecois whom Amanda had met on the most recent Christmas Bird Census in the Ottawa area. She had admired his ability to walk for miles in the coldest weather peering about for sparrows and starlings in default of rarer quarry. Jennifer Puppylove, the youngest member of the group at age twenty, had her chair turned so that she could watch the beaver and seal sporting in the central pool that had been installed for them. She was now Amanda's assistant, chosen because her father had donated heavily to Amanda's election expenses and wanted Jennifer to live somewhere else than home for a while.

"Henry, Claude, I'd like you to meet Jennifer Puppylove, my House assistant," Amanda began the meeting. "You both probably know of her father, Bryan Puppylove, who represented Cougar Falls for the Liberals before I won the seat." Bryan Puppylove had served in the Commons for six years, long enough to receive what he called his

well-earned pension.

"I remember," said Henry, who remembered all too well Bryan's determination never to speak in the House or sit on a committee if he could get out of it, but nevertheless did not hold the sins of the father against a pretty daughter. "Good to meet you, Jennifer."

Claude also nodded to Jennifer, who nodded back.

"I love animals," Jennifer burst out. "Look at that seal dive. Isn't he splendid?" She pushed her long blond hair back from her face in a rush of pleasure.

"She, the seal's female," said Amanda.

"The reason we are here," she continued, "is to plan strategy to advance the Y2Y cause."

The others nodded assent. Amanda glanced at the notes being scribbled by Jennifer who was to take the minutes of the meeting. "Not Y2K; that was that great scandal ten years ago. Y2Y. Yosemite to Yukon. Let's call it the Grizzly Way, to publicize our friend there."

They all looked through the window at the grizzly bear who was sprawled on the barn floor while Ben groomed his stomach with a large hair brush.

Amanda, wishing that the bear looked more heroic to befit her vision, turned back to the table. "We'll need literature about the corridor," she said. "I'll write that if you want. I'll talk about endangered species, and our inability ever to resurrect a species once it becomes extinct, and Canada being the last great habitat for the grizzly which needs lots of room to roam about. Other species need lots of room too, like mountain sheep and Rocky Mountain goats."

"And wolves," added Henry who had given the Commons wolf quite a few tit-bits in the past few weeks.

"And beaver?" asked Jennifer, who had switched her attention to this animal from the graceful seal.

"Less the beaver," said Claude. "Beavers tend to be sedentary, in houses, with little need to travel to the States and back."

"I'll talk about the gene pool," Amanda continued, "and how a population in a limited area becomes inbred and unhealthy if it has too few members. Which is why the Grizzly Way is especially important."

"If I can be the Devil's Advocate for a moment," Claude said, "this is all very fine, but let's be practical. It will cost money to keep a wildlife corridor linking the wilderness areas to the north and south of Calgary. Calgary's a big city and the people who live there don't want a grizzly bear in their backyard."

Amanda frowned at him. "Bears won't be that close to the city," she insisted.

"The fact remains," Claude continued, "that it will be expensive

and if money goes to Save the Grizzly, less will go to help the homeless, and AIDS victims, and research into prostate cancer, which already is grossly underfunded compared to breast cancer." As he looked up, he realized that the bear had left Ben who was now throwing sticks for the wolf and had parked himself in front of the window to stare in at the group. Claude, who saw that he was glaring at him, gulped.

"Stick to the point," said Amanda who had her back turned to the window.

"You all know the point," said Claude loudly, as if he wanted the bear to hear. "I'm for the Grizzly Way because I think the environment HAS to be protected if Canada is to remain and flourish. And with the Grizzly Way in place, the grizzlies will have a better future." He looked meaningfully at the grizzly who now seemed less severe, and indeed started to walk back toward Ben.

"Bravo," said Amanda. She got up to get more coffee from Ben's small hot plate.

"I'm not actually emotionally attached to bears," admitted Henry next as he stirred sugar into his coffee mug, "perhaps because I'm a member of the Reform Party. I admire the one over there," he said pointing to the Commons bear who was now rubbing his head against Ben's chest as if he wanted to repay Ben's grooming attentions, "but I don't want to go to the wall for him."

"Whatever that means," interrupted Amanda crossly.

"However," Henry said, holding up his hand to keep Amanda quiet, "I have a strong belief in the importance of social movements. That's why I think bears and all wild animals are vital to Canada. I guess I'm intellectually committed to bears partly because of how I was brought up in BC. My father was a fanatical hunter, and I had to clean all the rabbits he shot. He was a member of the Game and Wildlife Conservation Group -- it held a competitive bear hunt each spring, and a deer shooting contest in the fall. Anyway, I'm in support of the Y2Y and I'll do what I can to make the rest of the NDP caucus support it too."

"Shall I write that we all support the grizzlie?" asked Jennifer. "I do. Look at ours sucking up to Ben." The Commons grizzly was now lying on the ground while Ben tickled him under the chin.

"Grizzly is spelled with a y," said Amanda, looking over at Jennifer's notes. "Write down that we members of the three largest parties in the House of Commons are all in favour of the Y2Y proposal, and we'll all seek support from our colleagues. Oh, and that I'll write up some literature and send it around in a few days. If anyone has any changes, they should get back to me as soon as possible."

"The group will have to lay the groundwork for the Y2Y by using the usual sanctions and incentives to gain the support of members

who we really know don't care a damn," said Jennifer. The others looked at her, startled.

"Shall I write that down?" she asked. Although she seemed young and naive, Jennifer had had her years of growing up to observe her father in action and non-action, a master politician. She pushed back her hair authoritatively.

"No, don't put that down," said Amanda, rather sarcastically. "Just put down what I said, type out the minutes, and distribute them to me and my fellow apostles." She smiled happily at the two men.

"To the Grizzly Way!" she announced, raising her now empty coffee mug.

"To the Grizzly Way," they all chorused.

"The grizzled way?" queried Ben as he came into the room.

"To our grizzly and his future!" explained Amanda still waving her mug in the air.

"I'm for that!" declared Ben, reaching for the coffee so that he too could join the celebration.

It was dark as the group left Ben and the animals, the bear at last settling down to sleep beside the bison who had been comatose for some time. Claude walked toward Wellington Street beside Amanda, describing the fine points of a blue jay who had visited his apartment feeder that morning; Henry, who had a soft spot for blond women, especially young blondes, escorted Jennifer. She was rhapsodizing about the cod whom she felt was often overlooked because she wasn't a mammal.

Amanda was able to prepare both a poster and a brochure on the Y2Y Corridor over the weekend. On Monday she showed her work to Claude, who found it acceptable because it meant he then didn't have to do anything about it himself. When Claude returned the material to her after lunch in the House, she made a point of visiting the grizzly bear and scruffling him on the neck. Svend leaned over and patted him too.

"We're going to do wonders for Grizzle," she announced joyfully to Svend who had taken his seat a few minutes before.

"Oh?" he asked. "Is his name Grizzle?"

"If that's okay with you," said Amanda. "Grizzle's going to be a wonderful symbol of the wilderness!"

Svend smiled, wondered what she was talking about, but didn't want to waste time in asking and receiving an answer from someone as forceful and loquacious as Amanda. He returned to the report he was reading.

Amanda didn't have time to give the poster and brochure to Henry to peruse, so she asked Jennifer to look after this. Jennifer agreed immediately, because Henry had asked her out to dinner to discuss

business, and she assumed that this was it. She would show him the finished version that she had prepared in the afternoon. It was nice to get a free meal once in a while, especially with a rich MP.

Spinach Salad for Two

To Jennifer's surprise, Henry drove her not to a local restaurant but to a posh bistro in Hull where waiters, not waitresses, served dinner, and the entrées cost four times as much as she usually spent on her entire meal when she ate out alone. The owner, in a black dress and high heels, showed them to a secluded booth lit only by a candle.

"Did anyone ever tell you you have lovely hair?" Henry asked as he pulled out her chair so that she could sit down.

"My mother thinks so," Jennifer replied seriously.

"She's right."

"Your hair is nice too. There's lots of it, not like my dad's."

Henry was startled by her comment, not wanting to be compared with Jennifer's father.

"I have Amanda's stuff to show you," Jennifer said to change the subject, pulling it out from her briefcase which she had leaned against the leg of the table. "Is there enough light here?"

"No problem," said Henry lightly. "I have excellent eyesight and anyway, Amanda and Claude have already approved the text. I'll glance through this while we wait to be served."

He did so while Jennifer watched tropical fish floating about in a gigantic fish tank near the entrance of the restaurant. She was glad to see that the inhabitants were too small to be served as meals. She wondered why these fish were so pretty when the cod was not; but of course the cod had her own splendid muted colours, she reminded herself. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

"I think I'll have the New York steak," said Henry when he had finished reading and had had a chance to go through the menu.

"What?" asked Jennifer, her voice cracking with surprise and worry. "Surely you wouldn't eat a steak?" Jennifer was appalled. She herself had been a vegetarian since she was ten, and almost a vegan for the last four years. "I don't eat my friends," she replied simply when people asked why.

Henry was surprised too. He knew that the vegetarian movement was becoming widespread, but he had never actually dined with one. Meat was the focus of every meal he had ever eaten. He now tried to backtrack from his comment, not wanting to spoil his chance of romancing Jennifer.

"Oh," he said in some confusion. "I just wanted you to know that expense is no problem. Anything on the menu is fine."

"Steaks come from cows!" she exclaimed.

"Of course," he replied. "I was just trying to make you feel at ease. I should have suggested a cheaper possibility."

Jennifer looked at him with suspicion, then gave her own choice. "I'd like the spinach salad with mushrooms," she said finally, smiling to show she chose to ignore his indiscretion.

"Exactly what I was thinking of," said Henry with just a touch of regret in his voice. "We can have garlic bread with it. Would that be all right?"

"Wonderful," said Jennifer.

While they waited for the meal to be served, they chatted about Amanda, and the Grizzly Group, and Jennifer's dogs back home whom she missed terribly.

"You have a dog called Cucumber!" Henry exclaimed with suitable amazement at one point. "When I was a kid that was what I named my dog!" He almost persuaded himself that he remembered giving her that name officially, though she was always called Lady. "Imagine, two dogs each called Cucumber!" Jennifer laughed. "I named mine that because when he was just a puppy he loved to knock down the cucumbers my mother made into pickles and bite them. She used to get mad at him." She smiled at the recollection, then looked at Henry to hear why he had chosen Cucumber as a name.

There was a pause before Henry said with gusto, changing the subject, "Look! Here come our salads. Don't they look grand?"

They did indeed look special, green leaves piled high interspersed with slices of white mushroom, with a white sauce drizzled over the whole. The salads were equally delicious, or at least Jennifer thought so.

"My dad always said that spinach makes you strong" she said, collecting spinach leaves on her fork. "Like Popeye, his favourite comic. Why would that be?"

Henry couldn't remember when he had had a more healthy meal. "Why would that be?" he asked absently, biting into his garlic bread.

"Why would spinach be especially effective in building muscle."

What an odd young woman, Henry thought. But she looked gorgeous in her red sweater and pleated skirt, candlelight glinting on her hair, her eyes sparkling with pleasure at being in a fancy restaurant.

"I don't know," he said, slicing a mushroom with his knife. "You're the expert on food, and a splendid one too." He looked over at her and smiled.

For dessert, Henry ordered an ice cream and chocolate concoction that they shared, excavating companionably at either side of the large dish.

While Henry paid the bill, Jennifer gathered up the papers she had given him and which Henry had approved. "Can we drop the poster

off at the Acme Printing and Delivery place on Bank Street on the way home?" she asked. "That will save me a trip before work in the morning. They'll put up posters on telephone poles all over the city."

"Sure," said Henry. "It's on the way."

When Henry had parked his car in front of Jennifer's apartment, he leaned over to give her a kiss. Keep it light, he told himself. Don't queer the pitch.

He's nice, Jennifer was telling herself. But don't rush. His lips have tasted meat. She turned her head so that his lips brushed her cheek.

"Night then, and thanks," she said. "See you tomorrow -- at the Grizzly Group at six o'clock at the Barn."

"Good," he replied. As he drove to McDonald's to order a Big Mac to take home, he wondered if she was going to be worthwhile as a prospective conquest. She was certainly attractive, but she seemed very young and innocent. Was he willing to settle for spinach salad instead of steak?

A Romantic Bungle

The Grizzly Group was well under way by 7.00 the next evening. Amanda, Henry and Claude had each mentioned the Y2Y plan to their caucus which they would follow up the next day with the brochures; they were telling the others in turn how their reports had been received -- in most cases with cautious interest.

"My party is of course the most important," Amanda was saying, "because we hold the power. We can actually make the Y2Y plan happen. I really think my comments made a good impression."

Before she could continue, the phone on the counter below the window rang. Henry reached over to answer it while the others turned to see what the animals were up to. The beaver and the seal were cavorting in the pool, the seal swimming loops around the steady circling progress of the beaver, splashing water on the floor on her swerves. The cod in her nearby tank was watching them cautiously; it was as if she wanted to join the fun, but feared an adrenalin rush might make the seal hungry. The grizzly and the bison were relaxing side by side near the bales of straw, looking like characters in *The Peaceable Kingdom*. Ben and the wolf were hiding carrots among the blankets in the corner where the beaver slept, so that he could have the fun of finding them.

The phone call was from Claude's wife, Gabrielle. Henry gave Claude the phone.

"Ce n'est pas possible!," Claude was saying in an urgent air. "Où as-tu vu cela? Incroyable!"

Claude put down the receiver for a minute to address the others. "Gabrielle was shopping downtown and saw a number of posters *against*

the Y2Y corridor. On yellow paper like ours!"

"How could that be?" said Amanda in horror.

"Maybe someone who knows our plan hates it so much that this is a counterattack?" suggested Henry, equally aghast.

"But who could feel so strongly?" said Amanda. "What shall we do?"

Jennifer, looking pale, went out to examine their poster that the Acme Delivery people had tacked up on the Barn door that afternoon. She had been pleased to note their efficiency when she had arrived for the meeting, but hadn't taken the time to examine it closely.

Jennifer's heart sank when she read the large headline: THE Y2Y CORRIDOR IS NOT A NECESSITY. She tore it down and took it inside to the table where the Grizzly Group members stared at it in disbelief. How had NOW changed to NOT?

"I'm sure I did it right," Jennifer said in anguish. "I know I put NOW, not NOT. Why would I do that? I want the corridor more than anything!"

Henry gulped, wanting to back up Jennifer but not be blamed himself. "I went over the poster with Jennifer last night," he said. "I'm sure it said NOW. It must have. We would have noticed." Of course it had been dark, only candle-light, but he didn't want to tell the others about that.

"Maybe the printer did it? Perhaps he hates the environment?" Claude suggested somewhat sarcastically.

They looked at each other with dismay. The House was sitting again at eight (without the animals who were not required to work overtime), so Amanda, Claude and Henry would have to go almost immediately.

"I'll phone Acme's and have them remove all the posters they put up. It'll double the cost but what else can we do?" said Amanda.

"I'll go out and start taking them down around here," said Jennifer who was feeling distinctly guilty. Could her subconscious somehow have intruded the NOT into the poster?

"You can't," said Henry. "It's dark already and you shouldn't be out alone."

Jennifer glared at him for this macho suggestion. "I'll take the wolf," she said. "We often go for walks in the evening around the Parliament Buildings."

The meeting broke up in disarray, as Claude and Henry started out for the House, and Amanda explained hurriedly to Ben what had happened before rushing after them.

A Kidney Problem

Jennifer, with the wolf on a leash, marched along Wellington

Street, pulling down posters and crunching them into a plastic Gap bag. It was now completely dark, but the street lamps gave them enough light to see what they were doing. At O'Connor Street they came upon David Wrong, a right-wing Reform Member of Parliament who was reading the poster with interest.

"This is wonderful!" he said to Jennifer when she came up with what he thought was her dog. "There's a movement to quash the Y2Y Corridor even though it's hardly got started. At least some group cares about our tax dollars." He had never seen her before but he wanted to share his pleasure.

"How could a few dollars replace our inheritance? The habitat of the grizzly bear?" replied Jennifer angrily. She didn't know whether to pull down the poster that engrossed David and thus face a charge of vandalism, or let him continue revelling in his anti-environmental sentiments.

Meanwhile the wolf was faced with no such decisional problem. David had been to the grocery store to buy a half kilo of kidneys for his dinner the next day which she smelled through the plastic wrapper. She lunged for the parcel, grabbed it from his hand, and started tearing it open on the sidewalk to get at the meat; she was tired of the vegetarian meals Jennifer prepared for her.

"Oops," said Jennifer.

"That's the House wolf!" shouted David, now that he had a chance to look at the animal properly. "What is she doing out here? She's stolen my dinner. I always said those animals would come to no good, and now she's stolen my kidneys!"

"Sorry," said Jennifer. "But meat is not good for you. She's done you a favour."

David was so angry that he tried to grab the leash to punish the wolf, but the wolf looked up at him, her lips glistening with liver juice, and gave a low-pitched growl that stopped him cold.

"I'll see about this," he snarled instead, putting his hands in his pockets. "We can't have this going on." He turned and still mumbling to himself stalked across Wellington Street toward the Parliament Buildings where he was late for the evening session.

Jennifer was so upset by this encounter that she decided to call it a day and let the delivery service finish taking down the posters. She and the wolf returned to the Barn where she helped Ben prepare the animals' food.

"I'll do the wolf's meal," she offered, slicing carrots and parsnips into her bowl.

"She actually likes meat too," Ben said apologetically. "Maybe not a lot, but some."

Jennifer, ignoring him, put the bowl down on the floor. The wolf looked at Jennifer reprovingly, then took her hand in her mouth and

gave it a nip. The bite didn't break Jennifer's skin, but she knew this was a message.

"Well, I guess a bit of meat won't hurt after all," she said finally, rubbing her hand to make it feel better.

"I just happen to have some mince in the fridge," said Ben, glancing fondly down at his charge who sat at his feet staring into his face expectantly.

Comedy in the Commons

David Wrong was too late to take part in House proceedings that evening, but during the night, when he couldn't sleep, he went over in his mind the trauma of losing his bag of kidneys. The more he thought about the incident, the larger it became, as things do in the small hours of darkness. The bag was snatched from him. The wolf tried to bite his hand. The rabid wolf would have knocked him over if he hadn't defended himself. He had managed to save the young woman as well as himself from the ravening animal. Soon he had woven a whole tirade around his attack by a wolf in the heart of Canada's capital.

When he arrived at the House the next day, he was determined to make his grievance public so that when there was a pause in House activity he managed to catch the eye of the Speaker. Rising pompously to his feet, he began to speak in a loud voice.

"I must tell the House that I am broad minded enough to have gone along with the idea of having animals in the House, although I must say that privately I wondered about the wisdom of this. Now, because of a recent incident involving one of the animals, I have had to reconsider my initial position."

House members usually hunkered down in their chairs and prepared to doze off when David made one of his windy speeches, but this time they sat up and gazed at him with interest, anticipating some delicious scandal. Amanda, who had heard about the wolf encounter from Jennifer only a few minutes before, was especially alert; so were Henry and Claude who as yet did not know about it. What on earth could he be talking about? They had all seen that the six animals were healthy and accounted for only the previous evening.

David continued, "I propose that a committee of this House of Commons, with no animals on it, be set up immediately to review our animal experiment -- and I am sure all will agree that it was an experiment. The reason I propose this is that I myself had a most unpleasant encounter last night with the animal symbol representing Canada's Northland, that is the wolf, at this moment sitting beside the smirking Minister of the Environment who is sneaking her bacon bits."

The Minister immediately put his hands in his lap and tried to look both innocent and ministerial. The wolf glanced from the

Minister to David and back with cocked head.

"Last night on the way to the House, while carrying a small parcel from the grocery, I met a young woman, walking with the wolf, who was stopping to deface posters on Wellington Street opposite the Parliament Buildings."

Amanda raised her eyebrows at Henry and at Claude who both shrugged to show this was news to them.

"The posters were put up by some citizen expressing his right to oppose the politically correct nonsense of some extremists whose emotions have contaminated their reason. Something about preventing an expensive environmental plan which would allow grizzly bears to wander in our cities. Hardly a good idea." Amanda and Henry both rolled their eyes. Claude let out a loud sigh.

David pressed his shoulders back and leaned forward as he came to the crux of his story. His drama lessons in high school had not been wasted.

"As I was perusing this instructive poster," he continued, "the wolf began salivating. It sniffed at my parcel, then lunged at me and attacked my kidneys! -- which I had planned to have for dinner tonight." The last part of his remarks were drowned out by the cries from Reform members of "Shame, Shame," "Get rid of the Beasts". Several Reform members mentioned later that David looked pale and shaken as he spoke, so that they had no reason to doubt he was in pain.

Amanda, rising to her feet, waved frantically at the Speaker so she could rebut his statement which she knew was ridiculous. The Speaker nodded for her to go ahead.

"Mr Speaker," she began, "I have discussed the incident that the Honourable Member refers to with my Assistant who was walking the wolf for her daily exercise." She was determined not to mention the poster, given its history. "None of the facts that he alleges to have occurred have the slightest validity." She found herself slipping into the oracular prose that David found so attractive. "Their verisimilitude, as Winston Churchill once observed, exists only in his fevered imagination. The kidneys, that admittedly were coveted by the wolf, (and why not since she is a wolf?), were not part of the Honourable Member's body, as his statement indicated, but animal kidneys cruelly removed in a slaughter-house from a no-longer living bovine animal not unlike the bison." She pointed to the bison who, while chewing his cud, seemed to nod in agreement with her.

"The kidneys were in a bag leaking with blood and carried by the Honourable Member just at the level of the wolf's nose. Perhaps she thought he was offering them to her?"

At this David in his turn waved frantically at the Speaker, and

called out "I didn't say the kidneys were my kidneys," but the Speaker was focused on Amanda's story. House affairs were rarely so engrossing.

But Amanda's rhetoric was wearing thin. "The wolf after all is a carnivore," she said, "as are so many northern animals; there isn't much vegetation for animals with so much ice and snow." The Speaker, who found this comment too off-topic, motioned Amanda to sit down and allowed David to have his say.

"I didn't say the kidneys were my kidneys," he repeated this time so that the whole House could hear. "But possibly my remarks were not heard because of the cries of "Shame" which rightfully filled the air while I was speaking. I was trying to specify the identity of the kidneys which said wolf lunged for and snatched from my hand with the kind of fangs normally depicted in the fiction of Jack London."

David glanced around to see if the Members were impressed by his sad tale, but he had pushed them too far. There were clear signs of disbelief on their faces, and new cries of "Shame, shame," this time directed at David himself.

"Shame for teasing the House wolf!" a member of the New Democratic Party shouted.

"Why shouldn't a wolf like kidneys?" called out a Conservative member.

"Bravo to the animals!" Amanda whooped, and this time most members broke out clapping to show their support. David sat down crossly. Henry turned to grin at Claude. What had started out as a disaster had become a triumph for their cause: David wasn't such a bad bloke after all.

During all this commotion, Jennifer was quietly ensconced for the day in the House of Commons Library collecting information on "cods" as she had titled her notebook, beginning with the Harold Innis definitive tome on the subject. Jennifer felt especially empathetic with animals that weren't mammals and which other people usually disdained. When she read a newspaper headline such as "Animal Research on Mammals Down, Fish Up", she didn't rejoice for the mammals as did most of her peers, but grieved for the fish. She had no idea of the passions raging not far from her quiet desk, overseen by a quiet librarian.

Truthteller's Column

When Jennifer wandered into her small kitchen the next morning clutching the *Ottawa Probe*, past the Save the Whales poster affixed to her refrigerator, and opened the paper, she was amazed to see a coloured picture of the House wolf staring up at her. Geordie Truthteller's column headed "Commons Reaches New Heights of

Silliness" startled her even more. What was going on?

She was transfixed by his column which read:

The widely-held belief that animals in the House of Commons would lower the calibre of House debates was both confirmed and denied yesterday. It was confirmed in that the quality of the debate rarely registered on the Richter Scale of Earnest Public Policy Discussion. On the other hand, it was denied because the inanities spouted by Reform member David Wrong, which to his chagrin are recorded in Hansard, came from the human side of the House, as did the locker room shouts of "Shame, Shame" typically uttered before a speaker had the chance to make his point. Indeed they had the effect of drowning out the point he was trying to make.

The bizarre morning debate focused on the question of whose kidneys had been eaten by the symbolic Wolf member from Canada's North while Amanda Best's executive assistant, Jennifer Popsicle, was tearing down posters attacking the Western Y2Y environmental concept. (He had obtained this information from the perplexed Acme Printing and Delivery Company). This episode by itself deserves a separate column: The Honourable Reform Member David Wrong felt that charges of vandalism should be laid against Popsicle as he failed to comprehend, not unreasonably, that the posters which she was tearing down had been prepared by her and that she herself had arranged to have them posted. Ms Popsicle was destroying her own handiwork because of a misprint that translated NOW into NOT, so that the poster message contradicted its intended purpose.

Back to the House. Any observer of yesterday's "debate" with an interest in the issue of representation is not likely to question the recent arrival of animals in the House. Rather, he would dispute the continued desirability of the human members of the House within the contemporary expression of legislative bodies formerly deeply honoured in the British tradition. But given the apparent imbecilities of some of the members, one can only be gratified that they strained their IQs to the utmost in discussing the relatively harmless issue of a wolf acting like a wolf when confronted with a bag of bloody kidneys a few inches from her quivering nostrils. Thank goodness the members were not addressing an issue of any significance.

Looking down from the Press Gallery, I confirmed the belief that had been struggling to the surface of my mind for some months, that a House of inarticulate animals would be much preferable to the existing gaggle of humans. If ever there were a case for voice appropriation, it can be found in the membership of the House of Commons. Downsizing has not gone far enough.

Some members of the House who pride themselves as the agents of downsizing would be much better positioned as its victims. More on this tomorrow.

As Jennifer slowly savoured every word -- Truthteller had long been her favourite columnist -- her face slowly broke into a smile of delight. When she had finished reading, she clapped her hands together in glee, then clutched them to her chest.

"Yes!" she said, "Yes!"

She promised herself she would drop a note to Truthteller congratulating him for his brilliant column and with only a touch of petulance sign her name "Jennifer Puppylove", and, bracketed and in slightly larger letters, "not Popsicle." She was deliriously happy that what had begun as a fiasco for which she would have borne much of the blame, had now become a triumph that convinced her history was indeed on the side of the animals. Indeed, so clever is the rationalizing capacity of the human mind that, as she put on her jacket to go to work, she had convinced herself that she was the one who had orchestrated the whole sequence of events.

An Unexpected Dalliance

When she had walked as far as Wellington Street, she decided to take a detour to the Barn before going to Amanda's office beside the Parliament Buildings. The animals wouldn't be there, but Ben would, so she could share the good news with him. She knew that Amanda would be in the House and unaware of how late she was for work. Anyway, Amanda would be thrilled with the publicity she had generated for their cause.

Jennifer burst through the Barn door, holding out the newspaper, her face lit with a glorious smile. Ben's mind stopped registering "Bimbo", and started instead to think of her positively as an attractive (if perhaps overenthusiastic) young woman. Given his Metis background, which, prior to the recent resurgence of Aboriginal peoples he had attempted to conceal, he suddenly understood, with a certain frisson of delight, the interracial sexual attraction that had led to the emergence of his people.

Jennifer, unaware of the impact she was having, babbled on about yesterday's events and her lead role in producing such a great leap forward for the rights of animals. She felt no regret that this had been attained more by lowering the status of humans than by raising that of animals.

As her excitement gradually dissipated, she realized that Ben was looking at her in a new way, as if she were not a scattered girl but an interesting woman. And she realized that he was handsome, with his high cheek bones and his black hair tied in a long braid. She

blushed, feeling slightly guilty for displacing her attention from the Wolf and the Cod to a mere man. But she soon overcome her guilt with the consoling thought that her interest in Ben could be explained, if not perhaps explained away, by his role as keeper and defender of the animal members of the House. How appropriate it is, she thought, that my name is Puppylove and Ben's very position is an example of animal love. She blushed again.

As they wondered how to end their discussion of David Wrong, kidneys, and the morning's press story by Truthteller, they both realized that their breakfasts had been pitifully small and that coffee and a low-fat muffin would be in order. Actually, the low-fat muffin was in Jennifer's mind. Ben would have liked something more substantial, and hoped that Jennifer was not a complete vegan so he could at least have a cheese sandwich.

It was as if an unspoken understanding led them to head off together for the little Bistro nearby which was often frequented for dalliances between Members and their secretaries. Occasionally, since it had private booths, it was even used by Members and their wives or husbands who did not wish to be observed by their lovers.

After the waitress had taken their orders, Ben pulled the curtain around the booth, closing them away from the prying world outside. Ben had quarrelled with his wife at the breakfast table, complaining that he had done the dishes four nights in a row so she could go to her Sensitivity Group meetings. While driving to the Barn he had committed himself to restoring harmony with Rosa with a box of her favourite Turkish Delights. Now, observing Jennifer's eager and somewhat nervous smile, and remembering the snappish tone his wife often employed, he decided two things. First, he would not waste his money on Turkish Delights, and second, he saw no reason why he should not follow the custom of the Hill and have a lover on the side.

Jennifer's confusion was simpler; she was troubled because, as her name suggested, Puppy love, and other Animal Love, was all she had experienced in spite of being twenty. Should she be in a private booth with Ben? She didn't know if he was married, but he might be. Of course he would have less money than Henry who was single, but Henry was also much older. Would Ben be able to afford to take her to a sophisticated restaurant in Hull?

They decided to confront the obvious attraction they held for each other by evasion.

"What do you think the Grizzly Group should do next?" Jennifer asked.

"It won't want to sit on its laurels?" teased Ben.

"I've been doing work on the cod," Jennifer said, ignoring his comment. "Most people don't appreciate fish, or at least fish that swim," she said, noting that a menu beside them was advertising baked

Arctic Char, apparently a restaurant favourite. "It's a pity that some cod are eaten by seals, because of the House seal," she went on.

"It's a regional thing in part," Ben replied. "Most prairie people like me don't instantly warm to cod, or to seals either, for that matter." He brought out a cigarette and proceeded to light it; Jennifer was irritated at this, but chose to hide her annoyance with a spray of words.

"We have to think of a way of enhancing the rapport between the humans, who regrettably are still in charge, and the animals who elicit the least sympathy. Our carnivorous enemies" -- she had difficulty pronouncing carnivorous and was not sure she had done so correctly -- "will always go for the least defensible aspect of our position which is the cod."

"Let me think about it," said Ben. "Why don't we meet tomorrow after work and before the next Grizzly Group meeting? We can hammer out some possible projects for the group."

Jennifer was pleased with this suggestion. "I'll think up something too," she said. She hadn't scolded Ben for smoking, the way she had Henry for eating a beefsteak, but of course smoking was not immediately an animal issue. Perhaps she didn't want to discourage a future meeting? She must think about this.

Astrid Outsmarts Jennifer

As Jennifer parted from Ben at the Bistro, she decided to take the long way to work, along Sparks Street Mall. As she walked eastward, she felt light-headed. Was it still the effect of Truthteller's wonderful column? Or the memory of coffee with Ben and the prospect of meeting him again the next day? She had certainly been smitten with him. In fact, she thought to herself, if she put her admiration for him (she didn't want to label her feelings in any more bold way) in a hanging balance against her love of the wolf, she wasn't sure which would prove the greater/ heavier.

In this state of self-revelation, she did what she had often done before, although never when the possibilities of future excitement seemed more vital. She issued an order to herself: 'Jennifer Puppylove, you must not let this opportunity pass you by. Whatever stands in its way must be pushed aside.' She didn't articulate to herself exactly what "it" was.

On Sparks Street her feet took her, as if with a mind of their own, to a perfume counter in a fancy boutique.

"I'd like to buy some perfume," she announced to the sales clerk, whose name tag revealed her as Astrid and who was actually the owner of the boutique. Astrid was so devoted to the products she sold that her actual person was indiscernible. She comprised a face of powder,

blush, mascara, eye shadow, eyeliner, false eyelashes, lip liner and lipstick atop a clinical white uniform; her hair was so meticulously teased that its perfection immediately raised doubts about its authenticity. Jennifer became conscious of her more natural look -- no makeup at all. (Many cosmetics promised a completely natural look, but Jennifer knew this wasn't what they meant.)

"Our newest perfume is IRRESISTIBLE," Astrid told Jennifer, pushing a small green sampler bottle toward her. "Put a dab on your wrist."

Jennifer was about to do so when she saw the price tag on an unopened bottle. "Fifty dollars?" she said, her voice rising to a squeak.

"Yes, very reasonable. It's the most effective we have. For your young man," Astrid said with a simper.

Jennifer was aghast at this price. She picked up the bottle and read the label to see what magic the bottle must contain. One ingredient was goat musk.

"This is made from an animal product!" she exclaimed, with a mixture of vegan-self righteousness and relief at having a reason not to pay \$50. "I never buy products linked to the animal kingdom. And you shouldn't sell them," she declared to a discomfited Astrid. "If the perfume uses goat musk, the makers may also test it on animals. Do you know how terrible that is for the test animals?" Jennifer glared at Astrid, relieved now to be on the high moral ground.

Astrid, recovering from her fluster which in fact had been scarcely visible beneath the layers of cosmetics which covered everything above her collar, saw her opportunity to counterattack. Unlocking the cupboard behind her, she extracted an even smaller gold bottle.

"I have just the thing for you then," she stated smoothly. "This perfume, NATURE'S OWN, is made from purest flower petals and herbal extractions. It's imported at great expense from the Maldiv Islands. Nothing from the animal kingdom has ever touched it." She made up this last qualification, but it was probably true; hadn't the Maldives been stripped of animals long ago in the name of progress?

"It's almost guaranteed to bring out animal passions which is something quite different," she smirked.

Jennifer picked up the bottle which surely held no more scent than would last for three or four evenings. "How much is it?" she asked.

Astrid gave her a patronizing look, as if she couldn't possibly afford anything so fine. "One hundred and eight dollars," she replied. "A very good buy."

Now it was Jennifer's turn to be flustered. This bottle was over twice as much as the other!

"Ladies interested in animal rights will have no other perfume, I find," Astrid continued in a confidential tone, pleased with her own sly rhetoric.

Jennifer was now anxious only to escape from the store and the clutches of Astrid. "I'll have two bottles, please," she burred. She heard her own imprudent words, but lacked courage to cut her purchase in half, which was still at least ten times what she had expected to pay.

NATURE'S OWN actually came in two forms. The first, in a gold bottle, was the one advertised as evoking animal passion. The second, in a silver container of the same size, had been formulated by an eccentric chemist to discourage stalkers. The women who wore it had to keep on the move (or be still on a windy day) so that they would not be forced to smell their own formidable scent. It was a new product, heavily marketed, but not selling well. Eyeing Jennifer coolly, she popped two of the silver bottles in a bag, glad to have the chance to reduce her stock of this doubtful merchandise.

As Jennifer endorsed the credit slip, doing her best to look as if such purchases were an everyday occurrence for her, she noted with horror that she had scribbled her own name as Jennifer Sloppy Dove. Without correcting her signature she grabbed the bag from the counter and fled from the store, admitting defeat by her haste, and conscious of Astrid's contemptuous eyes boring into her retreating back.

As Jennifer now headed toward the office where she had to catch up with Amanda's correspondence, her brain took over again. She was sure that Ben would be captivated by her new perfume which must be a knock-out considering its cost; he might even join her in laughing about the farcical context in which she had bought it.

As she closed Amanda's office door behind her, Jennifer noticed on her desk a sealed envelope with her name, *Jennifer*, heavily underlined on it -- Amanda always underlined the importance of secrecy and confidentiality when doing the public's business. She picked it up and grabbed the letter opener to slit it open. If it followed past practices, the missive would list an imposing agenda of tasks for her to perform.

At the same instant, it suddenly occurred to her that she hadn't even smelled her new perfume. What if she didn't like it? Putting the letter and opener down again, she decided to open one of the perfume bottles. She cautiously unscrewed the silver cap and lifted it a few centimetres, anxious not to let twenty or thirty dollars worth of scent escape. She was staggered when she smelled not the romantic, fragrant odour she was expecting, but a pungent smell of rotting meat like the fleshy bones intended by Ben for the wolf which had been left outside in the summer sun all day by mistake. It

certainly smelled natural, but so did lots of unpleasant things. She quickly put the top back on the bottle, but already the office reeked of the disgusting odour. Amanda couldn't help but notice. Jennifer rushed to the window to open it wide, then flailed her arms about in a vain effort to try to replace the smell with fresh air.

Ben and Rosa Drift Apart

Ben and Jennifer had arranged to meet at 6.30 at the Barn to discuss future proposals for the Grizzly Group. When Ben arrived home an hour earlier, he came in the door with a look on his face equally capable of being transformed into a smile or a scowl, but leaning slightly toward the latter.

"Will you drive Rosella to her singing lesson?" Ben's wife Rosa asked. "She has to be there a few minutes before six to meet with the other girls. They're collecting money for uniforms to wear in the choir."

"I always drive her," Ben said with annoyance.

Rosa pretended she hadn't heard him. "And Ross has to be at his soccer game at six-fifteen. Then could you pick up Rex from the vet? He'll have to be carried to the car as he's still groggy from the anesthetic. I just phoned about him. He's too heavy for me to lift."

Ben groaned. "What's wrong with him now? We just spent \$300 at the vet's last month!"

"It's his incontinence. He's an old dog. The vet put a miniature camera inside him to see what was wrong. It's the very best new treatment."

Ben, who had psyched himself up on the way home to gain the upper hand with Rosa, could feel himself slowly deflating. He was sick of being treated as a Casper Milquetoast when this conflicted so drastically with his self image as a Gabriel Dumont or a Louis Riel.

"You haven't taken the kids anywhere in weeks," he exploded. "I'm sick of doing all the driving!"

"You know why I can't drive them," Rosa said in the measured and patient tone that infuriated Ben. "I'm taking the Women's Sensitivity Course to be a better wife and mother. Every day from 5.30 to 7.30. You know that. We work with both a counsellor and a psychiatrist. It may seem like a lot of time, but I assure you it will be worth it."

Rosa, one of whose attributes was insensitivity, had been spurred to tackle this quirk when Ben had moved into the spare bedroom and left each morning for work before she got up. As an experiment, she had arranged to get up progressively earlier each day for a week, but had found that Ben had readjusted his own waking hours, even though this meant leaving for the Barn in the dark and having breakfast at the 24-hour McDonald's on the way there.

Despite Ben's caprice, Rosa still didn't understand that any of the fault for the apparent breakdown of their relationship could be attributed to her. After all, she smugly told herself, I'm willing to leave the house for two hours every day, at the very busiest family time, in order to make myself into a more considerate person.

When Rosa returned from the front hall after putting on her jacket, intending to say to Ben, "See you later, alligator" -- the psychiatrist had urged the group to use light humour with their partners -- she heard the engine of Ben's speedy Bronco rev up and saw Ben shoot out of the garage with neither daughter nor son in his car.

Buffalo Bill Interrupts a Blossoming Romance

As Ben recklessly gunned his Bronco down Bank Street, heading for his meeting with Jennifer, he was conscious that his anger and frustration over Rosa's cavalier behaviour had not subsided as he had hoped. He was equally conscious that he was thinking of Jennifer much less as a colleague he had met at work than as a delicious contrast to Rosa. He was anxious to keep his displeasure toward Rosa and his developing affection for Jennifer separate. Jennifer might misinterpret his annoyance against Rosa as a cooling of his relationship with her, so he tried to plan in advance his opening remarks and the rest of their meeting.

As he waited impatiently for a red light to change, he forced himself to remember the calming effect he experienced when talking affectionately to the bison, as his forebears had probably experienced before driving a bison herd over a cliff. He suddenly felt at peace with himself, and was able to let an aged couple slowly totter across the street in front of him without experiencing the ulcerous fury with which he would have responded only a couple of minutes earlier.

Jennifer, meanwhile, was slowly walking toward the Barn from the office. She too was planning her first words to Ben and their subsequent conversation. At the same time, she wondered if she had done the right thing in leaving the note on Amanda's desk informing her that she, too, was aware in the office of the rancid smell of rotting meat. In her message she had speculated that the overpowering aroma had been sprayed by a carnivorous Member of Parliament, perhaps through the letter slit, cowardly letting Amanda and other animal lovers know that they had a potent (pun) opponent in their animal work. Amanda herself had sworn off perfume in her teens, deciding that the natural smell of humanity needed no disguise. She would never suspect that Jennifer, who seemed almost purity personified, could have used perfume, or indeed that perfume could even smell like that.

Ben's speedy driving got him to the Barn twenty minutes before

his meeting with Jennifer. At the Barn, he glanced around to see that all was well, taking in the seal lazily watching the self-conscious cod in her tank, the beaver and the bear both snoozing, and the wolf hunting for non-existent mice in the bales of straw. He then headed for the bison's quarters at the back of the Barn, a large enclosure surrounded by a fence covered with pictures of friendly rolling plains. The decision to put up the pictures had been hotly debated because the six zoologists consulted were equally divided. Would they give the bison, or Buffalo Bill as he was often called, a feeling of freedom that was of course a mirage, or would the contrast between his evoked memories of the rolling grasslands and the reality of what he was missing drive him to distraction? The three zoologists who claimed the latter thought that any bison of average IQ would immediately see through the deception.

As Ben opened the gate to the enclosure, he had forgotten this division of zoological expertise. This was partly because he had been able to win the commission for the paintings for an older cousin whose failure at the Emily Carr School of Art was attributed by all their kin to the residual racism of a white artistic establishment. The reality was that these pictures as seen from a distance could have been mistaken for the real thing, but the observant person would notice that the shrubs Ben's cousin had included were not native to the prairies but were, instead, unnatural horticultural specimens confined to the Vancouver area where the cousin had studied.

What the bison made of the pictures was, of course, unknown. Did he even care about them? Was he soothed by their subject matter? Or offended that the prairie vegetation was inaccurately portrayed? There was no human consensus on this, although a great deal of impassioned discussion.

Ben preferred to believe that the paintings softened Bill's demeanour. With this in mind, he opened the gate and walked toward the bison who was standing in the far corner looking at him. Although Ben held out two carrots for the animal, he noticed that Bill seemed curiously tense, and indeed somewhat forbidding. Ben's Metis background gave him the belief, false as it turned out, that he and other Metis had a special capacity to bridge this type of animal / human gulf with an ululating sound he had heard on TV from Hottentots intent on trapping antelope. He gave his rendition of the sound now, to calm Bill. The bison, however, for whom the Kalahari desert was not his habitat, knew nothing of this sound even if Ben had been an accurate vocalist, which he was not.

Specifically, it seemed that what troubled Buffalo Bill was that although in a sense his status had been raised by his quasi-membership in the House of Commons, this could not deflect his animal mind from the more important reality that he had not seen a female bison for

many months, and that it was now the fall rutting season. As the story was subsequently pieced together, there were divided opinions about whether Buffalo Bill, blinded by loneliness, had thought that Ben with his tempting carrots was a mate for which he had been waiting, or whether he had identified Ben no longer as the friendly keeper, but as the armed jailer who kept him from his biological imperatives. (One zoologist, perhaps in jest, argued that Bill was enraged by having to look at the picture of a non-native horse chestnut tree day after boring day).

Fortunately only one of Ben's arms, his left, was broken in the clash between man and bison, although his pants were badly torn. And Bill had inexplicably managed to relieve Ben of the charm around his neck given him by his grandmother and understood to be an amulet against harm in the hunt.

Jennifer saw this necklace dangling from Bill's left horn as she rushed into the Barn in response to cries from Ben and stamping and snorting from the bison. To her surprise, she was joined in the effort to save Ben by David Wrong. He had also just arrived at the Barn so he could have a private conversation with Ben. Together David and Jennifer managed to distract Bill, now subdued by the commotion, by brandishing two rakes so that Ben could scramble to safety. As the three of them retreated in disarray to Ben's room at the side of the Barn, the other animals all stared at them with attention. Apparently up until then they hadn't thought of attacking the keeper. Ben hoped they weren't getting any ideas. Jennifer hoped they hadn't been upset by the rumpus.

"We'll have to get you to a doctor," said David, looking at Ben anxiously. "You need to get that arm looked at, and the cuts on your legs."

Ben agreed, moving his arm gingerly to see how bad it was. "I'll just change my pants," he said, going into the closet where he kept his spare clothes.

"Do you want any help?" Jennifer asked, then blushed as she realized what this would mean.

"I can manage," Ben replied.

Now that David found himself alone with Jennifer, he decided she needed a lecture.

"You can't trust animals, Puppylike," he said to her. "I hope this catastrophe will show you the foolishness of thinking that animals can be our brothers and sisters. If you want to join me in fighting against the Y2Y corridor, I'll be glad to have you on my side." He gave her what he felt to be a come-on smile which enraged Jennifer.

"My name's not Puppylike," she snarled at him. She was so annoyed at his gall in getting her name wrong as well as assuming her future

beliefs that she sprang to Buffalo Bill's defence. Without even thinking, she blurted out,

"It must have been Ben's fault. No unprovoked bison would do anything like that."

Ben, who could hear what Jennifer was saying from the closet where he was struggling to pull up his pants, was stunned.

"What do you know about it?" he shouted at Jennifer. "You weren't even here. That bloody bison was out to get me."

"Buffalo Bill's a good bison," Jennifer heard herself countering hotly, whatever that meant.

"Metis folk history says that anyone who puts too much faith in the goodwill of a bison seldom goes on believing that to the end of their life," Ben stated more calmly as he emerged from the closet, his shirt hanging out over his pants because he couldn't tuck it in. He gave her an annoyed "so there" look.

"I've never heard such blithering nonsense," Jennifer retorted, then wondered if blathering might not be the better word. "Anyway," she continued, "I know one Metis who flunked folk history."

"We must go," said David, taking Ben by his right arm and leading him to the door. Ben glared at Jennifer as they walked past her, and Jennifer glared back.

After David had hailed a cab, he showed the driver his Member of Parliament badge which let him have Ben admitted to the special hospital unit available to top members of the bureaucracy and the political elite.

Ben Returns to his Metis Roots

As the doctor stitched up a cut on his leg, Ben's thoughts were close to total confusion. He had defiantly fled from Rosa, privately hoping he would land in the arms of Jennifer. Instead, he had landed between the two front hooves of Buffalo Bill, and had exchanged angry words with Jennifer. David Wrong, who had accompanied Ben into the doctor's office and surmised his new interest in Jennifer, decided to talk some sense into his friend while he was in this dazed state.

"If you fall for one of these vegan bimbos, don't expect any sympathy from your friends," he said.

He paused, but Ben didn't say anything and the doctor pretended she wasn't listening.

"If an occasion arises in which she has to choose between you and whatever animal is attacking you, she'll be true to her pathetic principles and defend the animal. It's insane."

David's words reinforced a thought that was struggling to the surface of Ben's mind. For him, a Metis, to be crusading with an animal liberation group was equivalent to Casanova taking a vow of celibacy.

As if to echo his thoughts, David continued, "If you're going

to be someone who other Metis look up to, you have to act like a Metis." This was really a pep talk for his own advantage, because David hoped to use Ben again in the next election to rally Metis votes. Although there was ambiguity at the outer edge of Metisness, no one doubted that historically the Metis and bison were closely connected because Metis in the past had depended on bison for meat, clothing, and the thrill of adventure. In short, the Metis' very identity presupposed prairies covered with slaughtered bison. A Jennifer Puppylove didn't belong there. The Brotherhood would see a man such as Ben who proclaimed animal rights as the product of too many intermarriages -- proof that he had passed over to white society.

Ben suddenly realized that he had been too much taken in by the doe-like eyes of Jennifer, and by her somewhat provocative naivete. In those enchanting moments with her (contrasted with the knife-cutting tension when he was with Rosa), he had almost ceased to think of himself as Metis. Of course if Jennifer had been aware of this, it would not have enhanced their relationship. Her attraction to Ben was linked to her perception of his otherness.

Ben sat up for a minute while the doctor examined the X-ray pictures of his arm. "If that vegan Jennifer wants to get along with me," he announced, "she'll have to be willing to sit at a dinner table and watch me chew my way through a T-bone steak."

David and the doctor grinned approvingly.

Jennifer's Strategizing

Meanwhile, Jennifer was glumly sitting at Ben's table in the Barn drinking organic carrot juice and looking out over the animals. The beaver was sitting on his tail looking in at her, as if sympathizing with her thoughts. She felt as if she was no longer the simple Jennifer she had been only a few hours before. In fact, she felt her very identity now lacked stability. Not only had she displayed an anger incompatible with her customary primness, but she had hotly accused the person she had come to think of as a possible man in her life, something she had never had before, of being insensitive to Buffalo Bill. She realized that Ben would see her solidarity with Bill as a humiliation.

Jennifer knew that she might choose Buffalo Bill over Ben again in a similar contretemps in the future, but she also knew that Buffalo Bill wouldn't fill an emptiness in her life in the same way as Ben. To dream of Buffalo Bill slobbering at the breakfast table or grunting in the shower or trying to clasp her in a furry embrace really didn't fit her emotional needs. Whatever she shared with other mammals, she knew that she was indelibly, unmistakably, human.

What good this would do her if she had lost Ben was a troubling question she couldn't shake off. On the other hand, if she and Ben

were to have a rapprochement, he would have to accept all sides of her character. No more would she be Jennifer Goody Goody Vegan Puppylove. He would have to accept her -- initially she said to herself warts and all, but she blanched at the idea of warts and simply said, accept her as she was. She nodded determinedly and proudly as she announced her decision to herself; the beaver, who had been peering at her closely, nodded his head too as if to confirm her decision.

But who is the I that I want Ben to accept? she asked herself. She chewed thoughtfully on a celery stick, trying to figure this out.

Amanda and Astrid Size Each Other Up

Amanda opened her office door, hoping as she had done on so many occasions to shut it behind her and unwind in the privacy and air conditioned coolness that it offered. Instead, she encountered a smell almost like a physical presence. She gasped, then went over to her desk where she saw her name on Jennifer's note. As she read it, she fell into complete agreement with Jennifer's analysis that the rotting animal smell could only have been sprayed into her office by an unprincipled person who preferred dead animals in butcher shops to the live ones she supported. Indeed, Jennifer's suspicion was so natural to Amanda that she instantly forgot that on opening the door the smell had reminded her more of rancid cabbage rather than the odour of bad meat that she now imagined assaulted her nostrils.

Amanda was not content to have only general suspicions. She sought a flesh and blood perpetrator which the logic of the situation led her to identify as David Wrong. I'll get back at him, she thought. An eye for an eye. If he sprays a repellent dead animal smell in my office, I'll spray a bilious vegetable and herbal scent in his.

Before she knew it, so quickly was thought translated into action, Amanda was standing in front of a perfume counter on Sparks Street being waited on by a beautified woman whose name tag identified her as Astrid. Astrid, who recognized from Amanda's imperious demeanour that she was either a Member of Parliament or a high civil servant, was a different person than she had been that morning with Jennifer. She liked to make up to people with presence. When Amanda explained her purpose, Astrid was delighted. Here was a second opportunity to get rid of the Stalker's Silver Stink as she privately called the silver bottles of NATURE'S OWN.

"I have just the perfume you need," she said. "In fact, there is possibly someone doing the same thing as you, because I sold two bottles to a person with a House connection only this morning. She looked like one of those scatter-brained small town blonds. You know, the kind who, before coming to Ottawa, thought that Owen Sound was

a big city?" Astrid wasn't usually so open with a stranger, but she had to work fast if she hoped to capture Amanda's interest.

"Just this morning, you say?" asked Amanda.

"Yes. I don't think she'd ever been in a boutique before!"

"Hmm," said Amanda thoughtfully, thinking of Jennifer.

As Astrid wrapped up the repellent perfume Amanda had chosen, she kept up a running discourse. "My sister thinks this is a very special scent, not the kind for everyone," she said, although she didn't have a sister. "You won't see this brand on television. It's only for adventuresome people." She looked at Amanda to see if she was flattered. She wasn't. "I'd love to be on television," she continued, under the false impression that if Amanda were a Member of Parliament, she must be somebody. "Do you know of any possibilities here in Ottawa?"

"No," said Amanda, waiting impatiently for her credit card to be returned.

"Actually," said Astrid, throwing caution to the wind, "the only thing I want is to be in the movies or on TV. I don't like this job. Some of our perfumes are no good at all at attracting men, although of course some repel men you don't like which is something. But not much of something. I don't even have a sister." Amanda was taken aback at being swept into the life of a salesperson during what she had thought would be a simple commercial transaction. She looked at Astrid more closely, seeing the classical beauty of her face and the animation that showed through the layers of make-up.

"You'd be good on TV, I think," she said kindly. Astrid beamed at her as she gave her the parcel, an expression she rarely allowed herself as a sophisticate to reveal. "Thanks," she said. "Keep me in mind."

Ben Takes Charge

Amanda called the Grizzly Group to order the next evening, the edge to her normally cool voice reflecting her difficulty in deciding how to handle Jennifer's lies about the stench in her office. The evening was to be spent deciding what project they should attempt next, to offset the disaster of the Y2Y campaign.

"Who's first on our agenda?" she asked the group. "Henry, any ideas? Claude?"

The men, who had been staring into the barn to watch the seal watching the cod rather too intently, looked startled to be addressed so directly. Jennifer, who had spent the day continuing her research on cod behaviour, wondered why Amanda hadn't asked her as well.

"Is the cod okay?" asked Claude, to conceal the fact that he hadn't thought of any plan. "Where's Ben?"

"I was going to come to him later in the agenda," said Amanda

apologetically. "He had a run-in with the bison, Buffalo Bill.

"What happened?" asked Henry, concern in his voice. "Is he going to be all right?"

"It wasn't serious. It mustn't upset the Commons Animal Project," Amanda stated. "Ben isn't going to tell anyone about the incident -- probably it would embarrass him. He has a broken arm and some cuts. His left arm."

"Did the bison attack him?" Henry asked.

"Yes, but it wasn't the bison's fault apparently. Ben thinks that Bill got spring fever, well, fall fever really, because it's the rutting season for bison." She muttered her last sentence, not feeling comfortable talking about animal sex.

"Rotting season?" queried Claude.

"Rutting, you know, mating," mumbled Amanda.

Jennifer, seeing a chance to rescue Amanda from the topic of bison reproductive behaviour, decided to bring up an idea she had been thinking about since watching Nature on TV the night before.

"I think we should arrange for some TV spot advertisements to publicize the Y2Y corridor," she announced. "We could tie in the Commons Animals to make the ads more effective -- she had considered saying "to kill two birds with one stone", but remembered in time that this was one of the violent expressions she was trying to avoid.

Amanda frowned at her, the first time she had turned toward her that evening, which made Jennifer's heart sink. Had she found out about her tiff with Ben after his accident? Or about the smell in her office?

"What a great idea!" exclaimed Henry, who still thought of Jennifer as a possible conquest.

"It has great possibility," agreed Claude, who now didn't have to think up a plan himself.

Amanda was backed into a corner. If it was a great plan, then she couldn't let her anger at Jennifer show. But she hated to join in praise of her assistant who had so annoyed her.

"We could have a woman and the grizzly together, to show how grizzlies need compassion. Jennifer, why not you?" said Henry.

Jennifer looked at Henry, delighted.

"Yes, I could do it," she agreed. "The grizzly knows me."

"Wait," said Amanda. "I have a better idea. Jennifer would be possible," she wrinkled her nose ever so slightly, "but I know of a person whose lifelong ambition has been to be on television. She's an ambitious, gorgeous woman, with I think some television experience," a fact Amanda made up out of thin air to ensure that Jennifer was excluded from the proposed position. "She'd be perfect. She might even bring in some young men to the cause."

"Who is this paragon?" asked Claude, who, like Henry, was

partial to gorgeous young women.

"Her name is Astrid," Amanda said. Jennifer gasped, then coughed to hide this evidence of her agitation. "I met her in a boutique while I was buying some perfume," Amanda continued, giving Jennifer an impassive glance. "What an arresting name, Astrid."

Jennifer's pen dropped noisily to the floor and as she bent to retrieve it, she spilled organic carrot juice on Henry's pants. Sensing the ground shifting beneath her, she impulsively decided that the road to the recovery of her reputation required a proposal for the TV spot they appeared to agree on. But she must avoid Astrid.

"Let's have a TV clip showing a grizzly and a bison -- you know, as if they were a lion and a lamb -- looking at each other admiringly. There would be an overvoice reading a message supporting the group's animal liberation philosophy." She had fantasized a scene that lacked Astrid entirely.

Jennifer was shunted to a marginal position again when Claude interrupted, saying "The Australian Friends of Mammals tried something like that on TV and became the laughing stock of the whole country when the lion swatted the lamb unconscious and was just about to sample its underbelly when it was rescued by the keeper. The lion bit the keeper instead, on the hand." Jennifer looked crushed.

Henry, aroused by Jennifer's crestfallen face, said "Let's not go too fast here. Jennifer's basic idea -- to generate positive attitudes toward animals -- is good. The particulars may require more thought, though. I've heard so many consultants lament that the news is always bad. To watch Peter Mansbridge just before bedtime talking about unspeakable atrocities in far away lands is a recipe for insomnia." The group was now looking at him with interest, wondering where he was going with this idea.

"Why don't we," he continued, "put on a rival program every night at 10 o'clock showing news from the perspective of animals, with snippets of animals at play, perhaps, to keep it light?"

"Would it be in French too?" Claude asked.

Amanda, who could feel her control of the meeting melting away, broke in, "We could have the cod draw attention to the cruelties and waste -- you know, those monstrous fishing nets that vacuum up all marine life from the bottom of the ocean."

Jennifer, thankful for Henry's intervention earlier, once again tried to gain the attention of the group. "Why don't we have the bison report what's happening to his comrades in northern Alberta?" she said. "How many people know that bison are being raised like cattle on farms and end up as high priced hamburgers or expensive steaks in restaurants specializing in erotica?"

"Exotica," Amanda corrected.

"And the route from bison browsing to bison burger goes through

the abattoir!" Jennifer exclaimed, now in full rhetorical flight. "We could have captioned photos of the cruel way they're killed. Bison slaughter houses, we can tell viewers, are not regulated. That judicial decision in Friends of the Bison vs the Department of Agriculture -- remember? -- the regulation applying to beef cattle can't be extended by judicial interpretation to bison. That's a proper task for the legislature." Jennifer was pleased at how she had apparently communicated these complex thoughts to the group. Her father would be proud of her.

At this point the door opened and Ben entered, startled to see the Grizzly Group at work at his table.

"Ben," exclaimed Amanda, "How are you! How's your arm? I'm so sorry about the accident!" They all looked at Ben with sympathy and interest except for Jennifer, who wasn't sure where she stood with him. She bent over her notebook in which she was taking the minutes. (She knew she was at the meeting in a secretarial capacity, but in no way did she think that this should keep her from speaking her mind.)

"I'm fine. I have to keep my arm in a sling for a few weeks, but it doesn't hurt."

"I'm so glad you didn't broadcast how you hurt it," said Amanda.

"No one's business," shrugged Ben. "It was good of David Wrong to take me to the hospital," he went on, to everyone's irritation. How could he get the credit, of all people?

"We were lucky he happened to be here," conceded Amanda lightly.

Jennifer knew that she would have taken him to a doctor, but he had been too angry to accept her help. She didn't say anything.

"We're having trouble with our public relations plans for the animal cause," Amanda said, to explain why they were in his room. "I've suggested that we have a spot on TV about animals that will make people feel good and not bad, as the news makes them feel. We can have a gorgeous woman I know called Astrid for the MC. We're thinking of having the cod highlight our focus on fishing boats that are taking far too many bottom-dwelling sea animals." She looked at Ben for affirmation of this idea, but was disappointed at his reaction.

"That's ridiculous," he exclaimed. "The cod isn't a bottom-dwelling fish. Surely you know *that*." There was a stunned silence in the room at his forthright remark.

After a minute Amanda introduced a second possibility, more tentatively this time. "Another thought was to have the bison on TV, if you don't mind," (thinking of the harm he had caused Ben) "and then talk about how bison are killed for food in abattoirs but don't have the protection afforded cattle killed for food."

Ben rolled his eyes to heaven. "Do you really think cattle have any protection that really matters? You have no idea what you're

talking about. Cattle are treating dreadfully during transportation and in slaughter houses, but the government doesn't give a damn. They even have vets to oversee operations, but they don't give a damn either if the cattle are stressed out and terrified." Again there was an uncomfortable silence.

Even at university, Ben couldn't remember ever seeing a group so ardent, yet so removed from reality. By now, having lost most of his deference to these carrot eaters, he declared loudly, "I've never met such a bunch of impractical parlour whites. You don't know anything about animals, except maybe dogs and cats and hamsters." He waved his arms expressively, and the wincing pain in his left shoulder emboldened him to speak even more aggressively.

"Haven't any of you heard of Compassion Fatigue? The idiot TV box has inured us to the pain and suffering and even slaughter of millions of fellow human beings. Do you really think a TV spot displaying a tearful bison on the screen with an abattoir over his right shoulder almost blocking out a McDonald's sign -- 200 billion hamburgers served - New bison taste treat now available -- is going to draw thousands to your cause?"

When Ben stopped speaking and looked at the others, he realized he had temporarily shed his Metis facade and been using the language he had picked up at university.

The others were dumbfounded, both at the effrontery of his critique and at his style. They all realized, with a faint sense of guilt, that they had not expected Ben, the only non-white there, to be a master of both passion and eloquence. Amanda also realized that she neither knew, nor had ever asked, what Ben's surname was, which, she recalled to herself with some discomfort, had been characteristic of slave owners in the American South.

"Ben," she said, pulling out the folding chair beside her, and using a tone that tried to avoid being either paternalistic or unctuous, "Why don't you join us?"

Ben, recognizing the moral high ground he now occupied, indicated, perhaps implied is more accurate, that he would feel more comfortable sitting a little way off by himself. However, after his little victory which only the truly observant would have noticed (Jennifer noticed), he moved forward to sit at the table beside Amanda. She, caught up in old patterns of thought, had to consciously prevent herself from shifting her own chair a little further away from Ben.

Jennifer said, "Ben, we've been having difficulty deciding what to do next as a group. The TV idea gets lots of support in general, but we can't seem to agree on how to get our message across."

Before she could elaborate, Ben broke in "That's just as well, unless you really have got \$85,000 available for a 30 second spot."

The gasp around the table indicated that Ben's point had been heard and understood.

"Look," Ben said, "saving dumb animals isn't at the top of my priorities, but I've been involved with a lot of political groups I don't believe in either. I've been remarkably successful in conjuring up political and legal claims for the Metis. And their only justification is that they seem to fit in with the politically correct spirit of the times. What I have in mind is stories about famous people that speak fondly of our animal sisters and brothers." He flinched slightly at the "sisters and brothers" as he recalled the bison hunts of the past that his great great grandfather had so graphically described to him.

"For example, we all know the famous statement of George Bernard Shaw that he was a vegetarian because he hoped to have his funeral procession made up of all the animals he had never eaten. (They didn't, but they were delighted at the thought.) Surely we can make something out of that, perhaps on the radio. And there was President Roosevelt and his little dog Fala, and of course Mackenzie King and his dog, if we want a nationalist spin."

"Sounds great," said Henry.

"Hmm," murmured Claude.

Ben continued, "I'll go back and check a book I have, written by one of my white anthropology professors, about Metis animal legends. He got many of the stories from my grandfather, who made some of them up because who can remember nowadays? I know he used to tell us kids one about a raven and a spruce tree, but in the book it's about a crow and a sumach bush. I mean really. I could persuade him to use some legends I got from my grandfather -- about the seal, cod, beaver, bison, wolf and grizzly. They would never have been published before." He gave them such a large, complicit grin that the others burst out laughing.

"That's terrific," said Henry, clapping him on the back.

"This professor is always on the lookout for new material, so we can give him what he needs. We'll all benefit. Nowadays a lot of our Metis political clout depends on our ability to tell our stories to middle-class white audiences, so we might as well make the stories useful."

"Isn't that a bit like Ruth Benedict?" asked Claude, who was slightly shocked at Ben's revelation.

"It was Margaret Mead," Amanda corrected.

Once again Ben was struck by the naivete of white people. He had studied anthropology and knew all about the exposé of Mead by Derek Freeman, an Australian anthropologist. What really amazed Ben was how the anthropology profession itself was shocked that Margaret Mead had been playfully duped in her Samoan field work by her teenage

informants. Ben had always taken for granted, like his fellow indigenous people, that native informants duped anthropologists. Why not? They never gained anything from these learned scholars, so they might as well have a little fun. He wondered how anthropologists reputed to be keen students of whole societies could be so oblivious of their own gullibility. The more outlandish the answers they got, the more excited they became, hoping that "their" tribe might become as famous as the Zuni or the Kwakiutl or, one that Ben often chuckled about, a vegetarian tribe that had presented itself as cannibalistic to a youthful doctoral candidate. Ben remembered the many evenings in which he and his Metis and Indian friends had literally been rolling on the ground as they read the accounts of who they were supposed to be. One wise old elder had remarked that one of the few joys his subjugated people had was to manipulate all the earnest do-gooders, including anthropologists, whose pious concerns failed to conceal their obvious sense of superiority.

Ben snapped out of his reverie, conscious that the group had been watching him chuckling quietly to himself. As he surfaced, he realized that he had become their implicit leader, an assessment confirmed by the obvious look of discomfiture on Amanda's face and the extent of her squirming next to him. Amanda wanted to take charge again, but knew that anything that might look as if she were putting Ben in his place could be labelled condescending racism. Not knowing how to escape from her dilemma, she seized a shred of leadership by announcing the time and place of the group's next meeting.

"We'll meet here again on Wednesday at 5.30, if that's all right," she announced.

The others nodded and were writing this down in their diaries when Ben interrupted.

"No good for me," he said. "I play pool with the boys on Wednesdays after work. You'll have to meet without me."

"Oh dear," said Amanda. She looked at the others, but they obviously expected her to change the time.

"My only free time this week is Thursday at 5.30," Ben announced.

Henry and Claude were about to object that this would be inconvenient for them. A subcommittee meeting they both attended on the suitability of providing information about Members of Parliament for a proposed Wax Museum might not have finished. But Jennifer, whose renewed admiration for Ben now knew no bounds, accepted on behalf of the whole group.

"Fine," she said, recording it in the minutes.

As she closed her notebook Jennifer could feel Amanda's eyes glowering, so she said sweetly to her, "I know that fits in with your schedule, Amanda, because your speech to the Tofu Society of Brockville at that time has been cancelled. I'm not sure I told you,

but that particular group has had a series of defections. Most of the members have switched to the local Ginseng Group. It's extensively funded, under the table, by the Korean Embassy. The president of the Tofu Group resigned after a dispute over the division of the group's funds and a large supply of silken tofu. I think all activities have been cancelled for the duration. I don't know what will happen there."

"Ginseng isn't ecologically sound," stated Claude in surprise.

"For all of you who think tofu is boring," Jennifer said to the group, ignoring Claude's comment, "you should try silken tofu dressed in maple syrup. It's glorious!"

Henry noticed from Amanda's pursed lips that she was upset not only with Ben, but with Jennifer who was certainly not treating her with the respect due an employer. She tried to speak, but only a croak emerged that she quickly disguised as a cough. As she turned to leave the room, Henry fell into step beside her.

"Amanda," he said in a soothing voice as they left the room, "You need a good stiff double Scotch, and if it weren't for your principles, I would suggest you use it to wash down a filet mignon." He intended this as a vegetarian jest, so was nonplussed when Amanda grabbed his arm.

"What a wonderful idea," she said, grateful that someone -- anyone -- had a concern for her feelings. "That would hit the spot. Where shall we go?"

The emotion between the two suddenly switched. Amanda was now happy, but Henry was disconcerted. He hadn't intended his gesture to receive the normal interpretation given such gestures on the hill. He only wanted to make Amanda feel better.

"Well, let's go for a quick drink then," he said after a pause, "before I have to go to my landlady's daughter's piano recital." (His landlady didn't have a daughter, but Amanda wouldn't know that.)

"You won't have time for dinner?" asked Amanda in surprise.

"No, but the drinks are on me. Don't worry. We won't let Ben get too uppity. It's got nothing to do with the fact that he is Metis," he said in all honesty, "but he's supposed to be working for us, and we'll remind him of that at our next meeting." He gave Amanda a wink as they walked off together.

Astrid and Rosa Plot for Ben's Affection

Rosa left early for the Sensitivity Course, having arranged a baby sitter because she could no longer count on Ben. Even when he was at home, which was rare, he slept in the guest room in the basement. In fact, Rosa was beginning to wonder if the \$500 she had paid to become a better wife and mother was money well spent. One of the course's fundamental deficiencies, she sometimes thought, was

that it brought together eight failed wives and mothers which spread a kind of contagion of dissatisfaction through the room. It was almost impossible for the sprightly young counsellor to lift the gloom no matter how blithely she presented her subject matter or gaily suggested topics for discussion. And some of the more despairing women had even dropped out of the course. However, having paid her fee, Rosa insisted on attending the remaining three sessions, each of which was to be addressed by a visiting speaker.

Rosa opened the door and went down the stairs to the church basement hoping that the visiting speaker, whose name she couldn't remember, something like Ostrich, would give her useful advice to get Ben back. As she said this to herself, she realized that she no longer had much concern for her role as a mother, but was focused almost exclusively on animating the dying relationship with Ben.

When the meeting began several minutes later, there were only five in the room -- the counsellor, the speaker called Astrid, and three Sensitivity Course members. Rosa noted with a grimace that one of them was her nemesis, an old battleax in her late forties who had already jettisoned, or been jettisoned by, four husbands. The other woman was a Sunday School teacher no longer capable of convincing herself that abstract spiritual love for all of God's people satisfied her more earthly longings.

The counsellor, Betty Dogood, introduced the speaker who was to talk about the importance of wearing make-up to enhance a woman's self-esteem and, at some expense, to make her appear as if she weren't wearing make-up. Rosa was struck by Astrid's commanding presence. She was dressed in a simple black low-cut outfit which managed to avoid being embarrassing only by a hair's breadth. This, however, was generally true of Astrid. She could tantalize while retaining her decorum. Rosa saw in Astrid, if her appearance was a guide, exactly the appropriate presence and behaviour to return Ben to the fold. Rosa's pen and notebook were at the ready as Astrid began to speak.

At the conclusion of Astrid's talk on cosmetics and the wonders they could perform, Rosa felt a sudden surge of confidence. She didn't care about make-up, but she did care about the aura emanating from the speaker. If she could remodel herself to be like Astrid -- strong, commanding, feminine, physically attractive, immaculately dressed with a faint aura of wafting perfume -- anything was possible. She hurried up to her hoping that they could have a few private words together. Fortunately Astrid was famished, as she had come to the group straight from work and had not eaten since breakfast. This was part of her latest diet -- tomato juice, spritzer and dry toast for breakfast, and then no more food until dinnertime. She knew that those pesky four pounds that had settled in places a less flashy dresser

could not conceal could be vanquished in no other way. She immediately agreed with Rosa's suggestion that they cross the street to the vegetarian cafe for a bite to eat.

Once they were seated in the restaurant, Astrid ordered first.

"I'll have cottage cheese and salad, and please dilute the olive oil for the salad," she told the baffled young waitress.

Rosa, who in her heart of hearts was a roast beef and potato person, and who in fact had already had a beef sandwich before the meeting, said, "Make that two."

At first Rosa had difficulty catching Astrid's attention. Her new friend was busy overcoming her famine of the previous ten hours. Finally, when there was nothing left but a second glass of skim milk and an insipid ice-milk dessert, the two of them began talking in earnest. Rosa spilled out the whole story of Ben, what a fine husband he was usually, his departure, the scheming hussy who she thought was weaning Ben away. She dabbed at her eyes as the story proceeded.

"What shall I do?" she begged finally, as if Astrid was a saviour who could help her. "How can I get him back?"

"I'd like to do what I can," said Astrid, "but I'd have to know more about him. What are his likes and dislikes? How does he get along with the children? Has he ever had any affairs?" Astrid had become quite interested in Ben on being told by Rosa, with some exaggeration, that he had an important job on the hill.

To stand back and observe their earnest discussion was to appreciate the petty deceptions and frauds that contaminate everyday life. Astrid, looked up to reverentially by Rosa, was far from the role model that her appearance suggested. Although she was almost 29, her expertise went little beyond selling overpriced perfume and cosmetics to gullible women. Further, although her attractiveness meant that she was rarely without a partner, none stayed with her for more than a few months, to her chagrin. This was partly because Astrid could not conceal her career ambition to be on television which got in the way of her ability to make a serious commitment to anyone. Now that she knew of a man who worked on the Hill and was bored with his wife, she wondered if she herself might not make a play for Ben that might give her some publicity.

Rosa herself was constructing an image of Ben and their past life together which would not have passed any test of truth. Although her presence in the Sensitivity Course indicated her willingness to take some blame in the breakdown of her relationship with Ben, in fact, when she signed up for the course, she hadn't really believed that she was at fault, or that the course would help. The simple taking of the course was an act of symbolic rectitude by which she would shame Ben into changing his behaviour. Once in the course, however, the counsellor's anecdotes of marital breakdown persuaded her that

she was responsible to some extent. The main message that she had received from the course was that relationships, even the most intimate, had to be managed and planned rather like a corporate executive trying to keep her firm viable in a threatening environment. This message left spontaneity and simple affection on the sidelines. Thus everything she had told Astrid, even the more emotional parts when tears streaked her cheeks, had in fact been orchestrated to produce the desired effect of someone needing help.

Astrid and Rosa had their separate reasons for wishing to meet again, even though Astrid had startled Rosa by leaving her to pay the entire bill which, as is often the case with tonier restaurants, had offered minimal food for a maximum price.

"Shall I drop in on you during my lunch hour on Thursday?" Rosa suggested as they exchanged light hugs. "Would that be all right?"

"Good," said Astrid. "Come about one o'clock. We must talk more about Ben."

Jennifer Gets (Jain) Religion

After Jennifer had finished her monotonous but politically correct dinner (tofu, beans, couscous and an apple), she noticed on her desk the slim volume on Jain philosophy that she had bought for 50 cents the previous Saturday at a church rummage sale. The only thing she knew about Jains was that they wore masks over their mouths so they wouldn't by mistake swallow and so kill any errant, aerial insect, which seemed a commendable dedication. Although at the last meeting of the Grizzly Group she had been impressed by Ben's leadership and pleased by Amanda's discomfiture, she could not forget that Ben at heart had little empathy with animals and when faced with the choice between a six ounce and a ten ounce sirloin, would probably choose the latter. In an attempt to balance her admiration for Ben and her adherence to respect for all forms of life, she picked up the book and settled in her armchair with some dried soy beans to munch and a drink of turnip juice extracted from organic rutabagas. The first taste of the latter convinced her yet again that a vegan diet was not for the faint of heart. She grimaced, swallowed, and opened the book.

Two hours later, Jennifer stood up and said to herself, as no one else was present, 'We Westerners are children in our respect for animal life compared to the Jains. I must kill hundreds of ants every time I go for a walk! And it doesn't even bother me!'

She put the Jain book back on her desk. 'I'll have to try harder,' she thought. 'I'll have to watch where I step when I go out. Maybe I should wear a mask, too?'

Jennifer decided to go to bed and work out in the morning her new strategy for *life*, remembering her mother's admonition always

to sleep on a problem before deciding how to solve it. (She forgot that when her mother employed this strategy, typically she had no memory of the problem the next morning, let alone the answer, but at least her strategy was a solution of sorts.)

When Jennifer awoke the next day, her resolve was firm. Her sleeping brain had decided that a public act of symbolic solicitude for lowly creatures was what was needed. Not only would she be kind to insects, but she would be seen to be kind, so that others would notice and perhaps follow her lead. This would be a wonderful inspiration and incentive for the Grizzly Group!

Following the Jains' example, she decided to wear a face covering, as they did. She fastened over her mouth and nose a painter's mask she found stashed in the back of her closet, the elastic running over the crown of her head to keep it from slipping down. When she looked at herself in the mirror, two blue eyes peered back above the white snout. Perfect. Carried away with her new image, she decided to go all the way and wear a shawl, a blouse and a sari that her uncle had brought back from India five years before. It had elephants around the hem, and a tiger that came over her shoulder and tucked into the waistband. When she had wrapped the sari around herself, tucking in the loose ends that seemed to have no home, she looked again into the mirror, pleased with what she saw. She thought of herself as some composite of St Francis of Assisi, Albert Schweitzer and Mother Theresa, but she wasn't sure if she was a missionary or a martyr. In the back of her mind, she possibly realized that dressing as an Indian woman even down to the red dot of paint she had dabbed above the bridge of her nose might make her unrecognizable. (Did Jains wear a dot, she worried, or just Hindu women?) Her official reason to herself, however, was that this Indian appearance was a way of underlining the spirituality of the Jains, and by contrast, the cruel mastery of all other forms of life assumed by the domineering attitudes of bourgeois society.

It was raining lightly, so Jennifer took her umbrella and opened her door, locking it behind her.

As she stepped out of the front door of the apartment, she met the superintendent, Mike, sweeping the porch.

"What?" he said, regarding her with amazement.

"I'm a Jain today," Jennifer explained, the mask muffling her words.

"A what? Is that really you, Jennifer?"

"A Jain," Jennifer repeated. "They wear masks over their faces so they won't breathe in and kill any small forms of life."

"What did you say?" asked Mike, leaning on his broom. "Is it crazy day at work?"

"I'm saving flies and other insects," she said more loudly, but

her voice was still muffled.

"Is it a masquerade? I wish I worked on the hill and could get away with what you guys get away with."

Jennifer took off the mask. "I'm a Jain. I said I'm saving insects by not breathing them in," she said rather pompously.

Mike let out a guffaw. "Then I'm Tarzan. You've got the wrong duds on," he announced, staring at her sari. "You should be topless -- Tarzan swung about the trees with Jane in Africa, not India."

Jennifer frowned, looking at the ground. Some people were so ignorant. If this was typical of the response she was going to get on the way to work, she might as well give up.

Suddenly she noticed in front of the apartment a large earthworm oozing along on the pavement wet from the recent downpour. When she looked along the sidewalk, she saw four more disoriented worms. She knew that if they didn't get onto the grass before the sidewalk dried out, they would die there -- she'd often seen their mummified forms.

"I save worms too," she said to Mike in a moment of inspiration. "Jains care about worms as well as insects." She picked a twig up from the ground and gently slid it under the middle of the worm, hoping to guide it onto the nearby lawn. Instead, it broke away from the twig in a paroxysm of squirming. Mike rolled his eyes.

"I'm only trying to help you," she said softly to the worm. "Hold still."

After several tries, she finally managed to balance the worm on the twig long enough to fling it to safety, to Mike's amusement as he watched it fly through the air. "You're going to kill it with kindness," he snorted.

"Now she's safe," said Jennifer in a priggish voice as she dropped the twig. "Worms are important to the health of lawns, too," she said to Mike as she set off in her sari toward Parliament Hill.

Jennifer put the mask into her bag as she walked, determined now not to save flies, but to save worms which were in more immediate need of help. She thought about worms as mummies. She remembered from high school that they were hermaphrodites, with both male and female parts. Could a worm be a mommy? She decided to go to the front door of the Parliament Buildings and work her way back along the few hundred feet of sidewalk to the Flame for the Unknown Soldier. It would take her some time, but lots of people would see what she was doing, and probably realize why, and she could make up her work for Amanda by staying in at lunch hour or working late.

Jennifer found her task exhausting, since it required that she squat, yet keep her sari from dragging on the wet pavement. It was a warm day so she was soon sweating, with the red dot on her forehead running in a red trickle down her nose. For an hour she had rescued large and small worms on the Parliament Building front walk, using

two popsicle sticks on which to balance them which made her job easier and was probably appreciated by the worms who then weren't hung from their middle. Many people had passed by her and seen her noble actions, often with clever comments such as "You must have lots of time on your hands" and "What about the ants you're squatting on?" and "The robins must be grateful".

When a senator strode past, she shouted at him to keep him away from one worm, and lurched toward several other people who were walking along careless of any murder they might cause, with the result that they nearly tripped. She was sufficiently disconcerted by this to wonder if it meant she was valuing worms more than her fellow humans. However, she braced herself, sucked in her breath, and said to herself 'Jennifer, that's old think -- new think, given the history of the treatment of worms by humans, justifies at least a modest degree of affirmative action for the worms.'

After watching her with puzzled eyes for a good ten minutes, a policeman came up to Jennifer as she crouched near the Flame, galvanized into action by a complaint to security from the senator at whom she had yelled.

"There's a crazy over there, probably harmless, but possibly not, who seems to be playing with worms," he had said. "She's bringing disrepute on parliament."

The security service was ever mindful of Canada's policy of multiculturalism, and of the fact that since the change in immigration policy in the mid-1960s, Asians, who belonged to a bewildering variety of sects, now constituted a large percentage of Canada's annual immigration newcomers. Security had informed the police, but indicated that this was a matter of some delicacy.

"What are you doing, ma'am?" the policeman finally asked politely.

Jennifer looked up at him, startled, her face apparently bleeding. As the officer took a step toward her, she screamed as his heavy boot narrowly missed one of her proteges oozing slowly westward. He took several steps back, making sure this time he didn't step on any worms, and explained by cell phone in a low voice to his superior what was going on.

"*Tiger* problem," he whispered, the police code word for a high risk situation, *lamb* problem being the code for a harmless crazy. "The person in question has on voluminous clothes that could hide a weapon."

After Jennifer had finished placing the worm with which she was involved gently on the grass, she turned to answer the officer.

"I'm saving worms. When the sidewalks dry up, they get stranded on the pavement and die. This is what the Jains would do."

"And the Janes are...?" he asked in a friendly manner.

Jennifer, sitting back on her heels to ease her sore legs, explained to the man the philosophy of the Jains, which he was too preoccupied to comprehend. Behind her, he could see the Tiger Team assembling, composed of four police officers, half of them in civvies for reassurance and half in uniform to symbolize the power of the state, and a psychiatrist. (They had tried to recruit a Hindu police officer or psychiatrist, but were unable to do so on short notice.)

As she began explaining the fine points of the Jain religion as opposed to Jain activism, the Tiger team began to close in on her from behind, two policewoman holding guns in case she was armed. At this point, unbeknownst to Jennifer, security men were cordoning off the Flame area.

The last person to cross toward the Flame by sheer accident happened to be Ben, who was going to the parliamentary cafeteria from the Barn to have coffee with David Wrong. He was preoccupied with worry about the beaver, which had cut his tail on a nail, but glanced over at the crazy woman surrounded by police. He automatically assumed that this was nothing more than one of those poor benighted souls with glazed eyes who wandered the streets in increasing numbers since the Ontario government had concluded that institutions for the mentally disabled imposed undue costs on the good citizens. He hurried by the group just as the burliest officer was approaching Jennifer with a straitjacket while the psychiatrist tried to distract her by asking solicitous questions and offering her an O Henry chocolate bar.

By this time Jennifer, glancing around, had concluded that it must be much easier to be a Jain in Bombay than in Ottawa. In fact, she realized that her symbolic indication of empathy with worms was getting her into serious trouble. The inane reassuring glances on the faces of the Tiger team, and the unctuous tone of the psychiatrist designed to put her at her ease, simply underlined the gravity of her situation. As she stood up, wondering if she should act as a modern version of Joan of Arc, her worm-ravaged emotions suddenly erupted in tears. Her unhappiness was compounded when the knot tying her sari gave way, releasing the length of cloth to the ground around her ankles. Had she been more conscious of what was happening, she would have castigated herself for wearing her valentine underpants that she had bought on sale emblazoned with hearts and saccharine messages of love. Suddenly, she recognized Ben looking curiously over his shoulder at the psychiatrist who was holding out the O Henry bar as if Jennifer were a dog.

"Ben," she croaked, so strung out that the word was unrecognizable. Ben stared at her, wondering at the attention the crazy fixed on him.

"Ben!" she shouted, this time in a tone that would have done

credit to an auctioneer.

Ben stopped on the spot, amazed at the dishevelled bare-legged creature with the blood on her nose who knew his name.

Then "Holy Manitou," he exclaimed, "It's Jennifer! What the hell are you doing?"

He rushed to her side, the others backing off slightly until they saw how things would develop.

"I know this woman," he told the team. "She works for one of the Members of Parliament, one of those active in the movement to protect animals. She must have been asked to do this. I'll vouch for her."

The team still looked doubtful, and in fact annoyed that their quarry seemed to be getting away.

As a policewoman helped Jennifer in the name of decency to wrap her sari more or less around her body, Ben turned to the leader and whispered "She's a naive young woman who thinks that sweetness and light should encompass all living creatures."

The leader, somewhat mollified at this confidence, cheered up, thinking that it was probably best not to have media coverage suggesting that he had harassed an Indian saint (although surely rather blond for that?) -- possibly a Mother Theresa-clone come to Canada to repay the West for giving Mother Theresa to the poor of Calcutta. He didn't notice the newspaper woman attracted by the cluster of police near the Flame who, camera at the ready, had moved up behind the leader to snap photos of Jennifer, Ben, and the psychiatrist holding out the chocolate bar.

"If you'll take this troubled young woman under your wing and give your assurance that she'll do no harm, my team will disband," the leader said stiffly.

Ben, looking at Jennifer's face stained with tears and red paint and her fumbling attempts to keep the sari material in place around her torso, sighed and replied, "Yes, I will. My name is Ben Canterling Caribou, and you can reach me at my place of work should you need me -- the Barn beside the Parliament Buildings."

Jennifer rushed to hug Ben, gasping with relief and gratitude. "Oh Ben," she sobbed, "Thank you! How can I thank you!"

"Now, now, Jennifer," said Ben, patting her primly on the back "you're upset because you got yourself into a pretty pickle. But if you don't smarten up, who knows who might see you as some kind of disoriented nut who could be a threat to the security of the state."

"I was only saving worms from being stomped on," Jennifer objected in a small voice through her tears. "It's what the Jains do. They're for life, not death."

Ben gave her a look of complete incomprehension. "Come on," he said. "I'll go with you to Amanda's office where you can pull yourself

together. Let's not be ridiculous any more."

As they turned to leave, Jennifer leaned over and snatched the O Henry bar from the psychiatrist's hand.

"Thanks," she called over her shoulder.

Gullible Rose and Devious Astrid Get Together

On Thursday, as Rosa walked to Astrid's boutique, she passed a newspaper box which stopped her short. There, on the front page, of the *Ottawa Probe*, was a large picture of Ben protectively holding the arm of a woman who looked like a dishevelled swami. Unkempt was putting it mildly. The woman appeared to be pulling up her sari, but only as far as her knees. Her underpants were covered with hearts and her face splattered with what looked like blood. Rosa reached into her coin purse, put three dollars in the box for a copy, and began to read what she anticipated was a story about some deep trouble that Ben had got himself into. The sari, halfway between the ground and where it should have been, led her to believe that Ben's trouble might be the kind he would have difficulty living down. As she read, she breathed a sigh of relief mixed with a guilty recognition that she would have experienced some pleasure had Ben really been in a predicament. Such is the inevitable ambivalence in the mind of a wife trying to win back a husband who may not agree that another attempt at togetherness is appropriate.

This thought was immediately dwarfed by pride as she read on to find Ben portrayed as a Good Samaritan who had nipped an ugly incident in the bud. She apologized to herself for the cliché but in the helter skelter thoughts that rush into her head, she could find no better wording. Ben, who managed to look handsome and modestly heroic -- his Metis background was underlined in the account -- apparently knew the woman, described in the report as babbling and incoherent, and had convinced the security people that she was harmless. In fact, and astonishingly, she was not a South Asian swami at all, but a young woman with the odd name of Jennifer Puppylove. Further, she was the assistant to Amanda Best, the prominent MP from Cougar Falls who was leading the movement to reduce the distance between humans and animals so that people would cease being cruel to their non-human relatives. Amanda Best had refused to answer reporters' questions when they sought her response to the unusual behaviour of her assistant.

Rosa, who was almost mesmerized as she read the story, realized that this might be one of the reasons why Ben had not come home the previous night. As she folded the paper under her arm, she noticed there were even more stories about the incident on inner pages, surely an obvious effort by the *Probe* to provide news that didn't involve death and violence. But she resolved to hold off further reading until

she met Astrid, who surely would understand why she was so eager to get Ben back. After all, such a combination of heroism and stunning good looks was rare.

There were no customers in Astrid's boutique when Rosa rushed in.

"Look, look Astrid," she called. "There's a picture and a story about Ben in the *Ottawa Probe*! Isn't he handsome? He rescued some woman in distress! Isn't that splendid?"

"He is good looking," Astrid agreed, taking the paper from Rosa. "Let's go into the back room where we can talk. My assistant Helen can take over for a few minutes." Helen was a mousy looking woman who was dusting the shelves lined with moisturizers.

When they entered the staff room, Rosa was startled to see tacked up on the walls picture after picture of muscled men from *Playgirl*, and some apparently from more low-brow sources. Astrid frowned slightly as she noticed Rosa's consternation, which clashed slightly with the fact that Rosa appeared to be examining each photograph as if she were judging a macho competition of males with unreal biceps. Rosa started suddenly, realizing that she was paying too much attention to one particularly bronzed Adonis to maintain the attitude of reproof she thought appropriate.

Astrid said, "Quite a bunch of guys, eh Rosa? It's all the work of Helen, and since I don't pay her much, I allow her this little luxury as partial compensation."

"Oh," said Rosa, who would not have thought from her drab appearance that Helen had such a deep interest in men.

"Mind you, I do find it stimulating sometimes when I come in here, but I really like a mixture of intellect and brawn, not simply brawn which seems to satisfy Helen. In fact, even intellect and brawn are not enough to satisfy me unless they're coupled with a prominent career."

"Oh," said Rosa again, who was unused to such confessions from her women friends.

"As you may have noticed, I'm a bit of a political junkie. Even the lowliest back-bench MPs, and sometimes the odd senator who hasn't succumbed to total senility, can get my adrenalin flowing. I've thought for a long time if I could only snag an MP permanently, I might use him to get a job on television."

"Yes, yes, of course," said the bemused Rosa.

"Now, what's this story about Ben?" Astrid asked, changing the subject.

Rosa, who had begun to wonder if she would ever leave that audience that Astrid was addressing, said, "Here, read it yourself. In fact, read it out loud, because Ben -- he's the one supporting the woman -- performed a heroic act yesterday. Isn't he handsome?"

He's Metis like me, you know, and he's connected to parliament."

Astrid's ears perked up at this information, and her eyes became ever so slightly wider as she looked at the large photo of Ben featured on the front page.

"My, you're lucky Rosa, to have such a man," she said, which was her unconscious way of indicating her own interest in Ben.

"That's the trouble," said Rosa. "I had him, but I don't know if I still have him. That's why I was taking the Sensitivity Course."

Astrid filed firmly in her mind that Ben was potentially unfettered, and that he was strikingly good-looking in a rough-hewn way. He was also apparently politically connected, although she was unclear about what that meant.

After they had devoured all the stories about the incident in front of parliament which the press had surely overplayed because of its bizarre nature, Astrid stated that she needed to know more about Ben before she could help Rosa reclaim him. She asked a litany of questions that Rosa answered meekly. Did they have children? (Two.) Was Ben helpful in looking after them? (Sometimes.) Did he do his share of the housework? (No. Did any man?) Did he take her out often? (Not really.) Was he romantic? (Not terribly. He had given her flowers on her birthdays when they were first married, though.) Did he earn good money? (Rosa demurred at answering this, mostly because he didn't.) Astrid wanted to ask if he was good in bed, but decided that might shock Rosa and reveal her own, not selfless, curiosity.

"I'd really like to help you," Astrid said finally, "but I think I should meet Ben in person. That'll give me a better idea of what he's like, and what your relationship is like."

Rosa nodded hopefully, delighted that Astrid was taking her task so seriously. What luck to find such a useful new confidant!

"I'll give you a call as soon as I can arrange a meeting with Ben," Rosa said. "I'll tell him I have a new friend he should know."

Astrid smiled to herself as Rosa left the store with a bounce in her step, then scanned the walls of the staff room one more time before heading back to her responsibilities in the boutique.

Another Committee Meeting

Amanda called the Grizzly Group meeting to order at 5.45. Everyone was present, although they had had to wait an extra 10 minutes before Ben sauntered in unapologetically.

"Could you read the minutes please?" Amanda asked Jennifer who was looking decidedly downcast following the recent fiasco with the worms.

Jennifer did so with a low voice, which was followed by the murmured approval of those present.

"Now please hand out the agenda for today," Amanda ordered.

Jennifer was upset to note that the second item was "Worm Incident on Parliament Hill" which could only mean one thing. In her distress, she accidentally knocked over Claude's vitamin spritzer as she handed around the sheets of paper. Her clumsiness was further underlined when, in bending down to pick up the bottle, she and Claude banged heads.

"Sorry," Jennifer whispered.

"Damn," Claude snorted as his glasses bounced off the floor.

Amanda, sensing the awkwardness of the situation, said, "I have a little story to tell before we get on with the agenda."

The others turned at her expectantly, glad to be diverted from Jennifer.

"There was a snail crossing a road," Amanda said, pleased to have an opportunity both to show herself sensitive to Jennifer's consternation and to tell one of her animal jokes, "but before she reached the far side she was injured by a turtle. When the doctor asked her about the accident, she said 'Gee, it happened so fast, I couldn't tell you.'"

The others laughed politely, but not uproariously as Amanda had hoped; the tension in the room was too strong.

"It shows that all things are relative," she explained rather weakly. At least Jennifer had had a chance to regain her composure.

The first item on the agenda, put there by Ben, was a request to import particular prairie grasses that he said Buffalo Bill now needed. This received quick agreement, because no one was willing to countermand anything proposed by Ben. Had they known the supplier was Ben's younger brother, temporarily out of jail on parole, they might have hesitated before assenting. Ben neglected to inform them of this kinship link on the sound premise that they would not understand the unique significance of family among the Metis. In any event, he would have been unwilling to push too far the sacredness of Metis families, given the fragile state of his own marriage -- closer to the divorce end of the spectrum than the happy couple end.

On her third try, Jennifer managed to read out the second agenda item, although the word "parliament" had rather too many syllables for her parched tongue to handle easily. Amanda then summarized the incident for the group, all of whom, of course, had read the write-ups and seen the photograph in the Probe. Also, they could scarcely have forgotten the awkward occurrence in the House earlier in the day when David Wrong had asked the Speaker to obtain a report on who the dingbat was who had disrupted the sacred aura around the Flame for the Unknown Soldier. He had said that to have a phoney Jain -- and he played around at length with "Jain" and "Jane" and "Jayne", the latter represented by Jayne Mansfield, Tarzan's Jane, and Jane Austen -- made a mockery of Canada's multicultural policy. When told to withdraw "dingbat"

by the Speaker, he had informed the House with an air of injured innocence that he failed to understand why animal liberationists would protest "ding bat", for whom it could obviously have no negative connotations. It had taken the Speaker several minutes to restore order amidst the hilarity of the House, with Amanda loudly demanding why the House wasn't spending its time on more useful matters. Just when it seemed that order had been restored, Buffalo Bill had let out a loud, foul belch which produced another general wave of laughter; the MPs sitting near him had turned green, several of them leaving their seats.

Jennifer, flushed with embarrassment and holding her head in her hands, stared fixedly at the floor as if, Henry unkindly thought, she were still looking for earthworms to cherish where none had ever been. She slowly raised her eyes and squinted at the faces around her. Most were impassive.

"We are all proud of what Ben did to defuse the situation," Amanda announced, having decided it was better to focus on Ben's bravery rather than on Jennifer's folly.

"You all would have done what I did, if you'd been there," said Ben in a self-deprecating voice, although he was obviously pleased.

"I hope we won't have any repeat of such behaviour," Claude said stiffly, looking at Jennifer. He was still annoyed at the spritzer spilled on his pants and the bent frame of his glasses. "I feel that Jennifer deserves a reprimand for making our group the laughing stock of readers of the *Probe*, of fellow MPs, and doubtless, that evening, of all who tuned in to Peter Mansbridge reading the news on the National.

Claude sensed Amanda's displeasure at his suggestion, but this was mild compared to the trembling consternation on Jennifer's face. He immediately changed tactics -- animals rights people have tender hearts.

"We must as a group pass a resolution reprimanding Jennifer simply to distance the group from an incident that the public has difficulty grasping," he said, "although every one in this room understands that Jennifer Puppylove acted as she did from the noblest of intentions."

Jennifer couldn't figure out if she was being chastised or forgiven, but decided that she would fix the minutes later so that they did not deal with her too harshly. She would also have to give Ben his proper pride of place in the minutes, of course, for without his assistance goodness knows in what dank cell she might now be languishing.

"Let's move on to Item 3 now," said Amanda, glad that the difficulties associated with Jennifer were behind them. "There's no

use crying over spilt milk." (Was this a suitable metaphor for a vegan?)

"Item 3 is the Report on the future Public Relations of the group by Ben," announced Jennifer. Ben stood up and went to the blackboard with chalk in his hand. The confidence he exuded belied the fact that he had completely forgotten about this oral report and had done nothing whatsoever to prepare for it.

"First, I'd like you all to join me in thanking the Aboriginal Chief and Council of the Nation on whose land we are now meeting," he said slowly to mark time for himself to decide how to proceed. The others dutifully closed their eyes for a few seconds.

"We also thank Gitchi Manitou who is watching over us," he continued after a long pause, so they again shut their eyes for what seemed like several minutes.

"Public relations," he began in a slow and serious voice, "is a very important part of every business and of every group such as ourselves. It can be carried on in a variety of ways." He was slowly listing endless possibilities (letters, posters, emails, faxes, magazines, songs, papers, announcements ...) to the group's dismay when Amanda broke in.

"Why don't we go right to the tribal legends that you're making up and we'll exploit," she said candidly to Ben.

"Of course," said Ben, nonplussed. Then, with a flash of insight, he went on, "I have, of course, discussed this possibility with a number of elders from Alberta, but I'm afraid they think our group would be accused of voice appropriation, or 'stealing our people's stories one more time,' as one elder put it." This point actually had been made by a friend several months earlier while he and Ben were sharing several beers and watching a football game on TV.

"Let me tell you exactly what they believe," he went on, and proceeded to do so at length. The others listened for a while, then gradually began to doze off until the only sound in the room was gentle breathing as a backdrop to Ben's monologue.

The Raccoon Comes, Disrupts and Flees

When Rose got home after work and began folding the laundry, she reflected on her meeting with Astrid. She decided that having the two of them visit Ben together, given their agenda, might be difficult. If Astrid appeared clearly in the guise of a marriage counsellor, Ben would immediately react negatively toward the idea that any outsider would try to invade their private life. He was, in other words, a typical male, Rosa concluded. While that was one reason she loved him, it also made it difficult when anything went wrong. He confused his unwillingness to take advice with macho

behaviour. Little did she know it, but her problem would soon be solved.

Rosa's ruminations were disturbed by a frantic knocking at the door. She opened it to find Tina Tremble, her next door neighbour in a state that reflected her name.

"Something awful has happened," she gasped, panting as if out of breath.

"What is it!" asked Rosa in a panic. "Are my kids okay?"

"Yes, yes, it's a raccoon, out back," Tina said.

"What about it?" A raccoon might explain the scuffling she had heard recently emanating from the attic. "Calm down, Tina. Tell me what's happened."

Tina took a big breath. "It's that old woman Agatha who lives behind here. She was walking Bambi in the back lane when Bambi saw the raccoon in our yard and made a lunge for it."

"Who's Bambi?" Rosa asked.

"Bambi's her rottweiler. He pulled so hard that he knocked Agatha off her feet and I think dislocated her shoulder. I was napping, but Agatha's shrieks and Bambi's barking and the raccoon's squeals woke me."

"We'd better see how Agatha is," said Rosa, joining Tina on her front porch. Tina, now that she had a colleague to help her, felt more settled.

"The funny thing is that we've all been terrified of Bambi for years," she told Rosa as they headed for the back lane. "But the raccoon had his number in no time. Bambi ran pell mell off down the lane. Isn't that something?" She was about to laugh when they saw the large raccoon lying on the ground, regarding them with cold eyes. There was a patch of blood on the ground, and its right hind leg seemed to be broken.

"Poor brave animal," said Tina in a soothing voice, kneeling down a few feet away from it.

"Don't forget Agatha," Rosa hissed at her. She walked to the fallen woman lying in the dust of the back lane.

"Are you all right?" she asked sympathetically. "Shall I call an ambulance?"

"No I am not all right," retorted Agatha, glaring up at her. "Do I look all right? I can't even move my arm. Get me to a doctor's." She wanted to order Rosa to catch Bambi, but knew that her dog was unpopular in the neighbourhood.

"I'll call a taxi," decided Rosa.

When she had done so, and Agatha had been swept away to her doctor, Tina and Rosa returned from the street to the lawn where the raccoon still lay.

"I'll phone the Humane Society and get them to take it away,"

Rosa announced. "There's nothing else we can do."

Tina was aghast at this idea. She had developed an instant affection for the raccoon, partly because it had trounced Bambi who was universally hated and feared in the neighbourhood.

"Oh no, Rosa," she said. "Isn't there some one who could look after and heal this brave animal? We could take it to a vet to begin with. I've got some grocery money I could spend on it."

Rosa's first thought -- 'What a silly woman' -- was fortunately not uttered, as it would have contradicted her sudden blurted out assertion, "Nobody would be better at helping it than Ben. He has a special rapport with animals." It had occurred to her that the raccoon would be a wonderful intermediary between her and Astrid and Ben.

'Much more than with you, I guess,' Tina thought, but said, "Why that's wonderful. We can take it to him in our cat cage."

Rosa frantically back-pedalled. "I can take it," she said. "I have a meeting right away downtown. I can take the raccoon and drop it off at Ben's place first. Can you bring out your cage?"

Tina returned from her house with a large cage, a leather apron, a long-sleeved plaid shirt, and thick gloves. She was used to taking her cat for shots. Together, the two women managed to manoeuvre the raccoon into the cage with only a few scratches for Rosa. It was obviously a sick animal.

While Tina carried the cage to Rosa's car, Rosa hurried into her house to phone Astrid.

"I'm so glad you're there," she stated when Astrid, who was sitting in the staff room admiring biceps, answered the phone. "Get ready right away. We're going to Ben's immediately. I'll pick you up at the boutique in ten minutes with a surprise in the back seat!"

"Okay," said Astrid, surprised. She wondered why Rosa imagined she would leap at her command if she didn't have a personal reason for doing so. Rosa was awfully naive.

Tina was standing by the back door of Rosa's car, whispering endearments to the raccoon. As Rosa helped her wrestle the cage into the back seat, her thoughts (unlike Tina's) were as far removed from sympathy with the raccoon as they could possibly be. The animal was purely and simply the instrument for having Astrid meet Ben. If the animal was a raccoon, and a bloodied one, so be it.

When Rosa arrived outside the boutique where Astrid was waiting for her, Astrid let out a shriek when she saw the raccoon in the cage on the back seat of Rosa's car.

"What is it?" she said in distaste.

"A raccoon," explained Rosa. "It was hurt by a dog at my place, so it's the ideal way to get you to meet Ben!"

"Yes," said Astrid doubtfully. "Does Ben work with animals?"

She had imagined him in a much more erudite profession.

"Yes," answered Rosa proudly, not sensing Astrid's reservation. "He's the head of the House of Commons Animal Group."

"What a big brute!" Astrid said, peering at the raccoon as she got into the front seat beside Rosa. The raccoon hissed at her, either sensing negative emanations from the two women or reacting to the unusually potent perfume that Astrid had put behind her ears to attract Ben's attention.

As they drove toward the Barn, Rosa filled Astrid in on their strategy to appeal to Ben's sense that he could handle any animal in any state of health; she hoped that this would provide an entrée for an amiable conversation among the three of them.

"Your role is to watch Ben and see how he behaves," she told Astrid. "See if you can detect any chinks in his armour that we can exploit to restore our marriage."

Astrid rolled her eyes but otherwise restrained herself. "Okay," she said mildly.

"I'll explain that you were one of the speakers at my Sensitivity Course, and that we've become friends. I'll say we were meeting at my house for an early dinner when Tina Tremble, that's my neighbour, came to the door and told us about the bloody raccoon."

The hissing from the back seat increased in shrillness, as if in response to Rosa's mendacity. When the raccoon sneezed in reaction to Astrid's perfume, Astrid opened the window and covered her mouth and nose with a hankie, fearing that raccoon germs were circulating around her head.

When Rosa had parked her car, the two women lugged the caged raccoon into the barn and then opened the door into Ben's room to the right of the main door. To Rosa's horror she saw not Ben munching sandwiches on his break as expected, but a meeting of five people. Ben was standing at the blackboard lecturing to what, to Rosa's eyes, seemed an unusually well-dressed (and somnolent) group -- not Ben's normal friends. As her eyes circled the people around the table, they paused at the woman whose photograph she had seen in the newspaper with Ben. She wasn't a swami at all, but an attractive young woman!

When she preceded Astrid into the room, Rosa had left her accomplice struggling behind her, carrying the cage all by herself, holding it as far from her body as her slender arms and the weight of the raccoon allowed. When everyone in the room started and turned to stare at the cause of the interruption, Astrid dropped the cage in what seemed to her a dramatic statement. The cage door flew open, and the squealing raccoon rolled out onto the floor.

Ben, struggling to be creative at the blackboard, had realized that his attempt to play a leadership role for the publicity efforts of the group was foundering for two reasons. He had completely

forgotten that he had promised to bring innovative ideas to the group, and he doubted that they really believed that the elders had refused to provide him with traditional stories as he had promised.

When he heard the crash of the raccoon's cage hitting the floor behind him, Ben was delighted at the interruption. As he whirled around, he saw the terrified raccoon trying to stand but falling over on his badly mangled leg which couldn't support him. The chilling hiss he uttered had a remarkable effect on the Grizzly Group. Indeed, it confirmed that behind their apparent unanimity of purpose they were far from united in their heart of hearts. Jennifer, ever the Girl Guide leader, stopped taking notes and moved quietly towards the raccoon, cooing "It's okay, coony. Don't be afraid."

Her plan to cradle the poor animal in her arms generated a shriek from Amanda who had clambered onto the table.

"Get that beast out of here," she screamed, her face ashen.

"Sacre bleu," muttered Claude, ransacking his mind to try to remember if raccoons could have AIDS.

Henry looked quizzically around him, quietly contemplating, with increasing satisfaction as he surveyed the pandemonium, his decision not to run again for parliament.

Ben, noting the confusion and disarray of the Grizzly Group, and feeling correctly that they looked to him to do something on the premise that all Metis had a natural affinity with animals, saw this crisis as an opportunity to reestablish his authority which he had been dissipating in his rambling lecture.

"Don't you white folk worry," he said, although as soon as he had uttered these words he realized they might strike a false note, "We Metis know how to handle wounded animals."

At this, the truly observant would have noted Rosa rolling her eyes toward the ceiling, remembering how earlier in the year Ben had caught both his finger in the livetraps he had set, and been bitten by the mouse he had caught. She longed to tell the group how Ben had insisted that she drive him to the doctor's immediately, but glancing at Astrid knew this would not be the best strategy for a reconciliation with her husband.

Ben was creeping confidently toward the raccoon at the same time as Jennifer was stealing toward him from the other end of the table, picturing herself as a female Francis of Assisi. As they both bent toward him, Jennifer making soothing noises and Ben talking to him in the few words of Mischief he knew, foolishly thinking that this would pacify the animal, they bumped heads and lost their balance, almost toppling onto the benighted Coony. Coony let out a shriek, and Ben and Jennifer both groaned.

Claude's second "Sacre bleu" was louder than before; Amanda clearly wished that the table were higher; Henry shook himself out

of his reverie to gawk at the bodies on the floor beside him.

The raccoon had initially sunk his teeth into Ben's nose, but then in its struggles had torn Jennifer's skirt, revealing her second pair of valentine underpants. Astrid, who had dabbled in a few art courses in an attempt to gain the polish she thought her managerial role at the boutique required, saw the unfolding scene as one that Breughel could have depicted.

Rosa rushed to Ben's aid just as the traumatized raccoon managed to scramble with pain out the door, hissing. He would have been trapped in the Barn, had not the Barn door been opened at that moment by David Wrong who had dropped by to talk to Ben. Seeing his chance, the raccoon brushed past David, nearly knocking him over, and disappeared around the corner of the building.

"What the bloody hell was that?" shouted David. He entered the meeting room prepared to demand an explanation, but the scene of disarray there stopped him.

"What is going on?" he asked instead, suppressing a giggle at seeing Jennifer and Ben on the floor and Amanda on the table. "What can I do?"

In the embarrassed silence that followed, Amanda's shaken voice finally said, "Nothing, David, this is just a meeting of the Grizzly Group. I'm checking the lights to see if I should get a brighter bulb."

David, too much of a gentleman to point out that the lights, in fact, were fluorescent, held out a hand to help Amanda clamber back onto her chair.

"I see," he said.

The snarl of limbs that belonged to Ben, Jennifer and Rosa was slowly disentangling; only Ben, whose nose was bleeding, was hurt.

"You should get a tetanus shot for that," Claude said.

"Yes, of course," agreed Amanda, trying to gloss over her past behaviour. "One can't be too careful with such a cut. Wild raccoons can be very dangerous."

"I'll drive him to the doctor's," offered Rosa.

"Take him to the hospital for MPs," David said. "They'll have his personal information on file there. That's where I took him when the buffalo broke his arm," he reminded the group.

As Rosa helped Ben from the room, she winked at Astrid, thinking that their raccoon plan could not have worked better. Astrid's smile appeared somewhat forced, but Rosa put this down to the tension in the room.

"Good to see the Group functioning well," David commented sarcastically after Rosa had shut the door.

"Yes," said Amanda abstractedly, straightening out the papers on the table that she had been standing on.

"Mind if I take a look around the Barn now that I'm here?" he

asked the group.

"Of course not," lied Amanda.

"The raccoon was a visitor, not one of our animals," Jennifer stated, to try and make the group look less disorganized. Neither she nor Amanda had been in the Barn for the better part of a week, so they were nervous about David snooping there.

"I'd like to go, too," said Astrid. With Rosa and her car gone, she was now left without a ride in a group of almost complete strangers. This seemed like a good way to escape. As well, when she looked at David, she noticed that he wasn't bad looking, he was well dressed, and he had a certain "take charge" aura about him. Her incipient admiration for Ben had been gravely weakened by his bungled response to the wounded raccoon.

When David looked at her, he saw a possible groupie of the kind that clustered around any Member of Parliament, suffering from the illusion that to be close to an MP was to be close to the seat of power. The reason that so many MPs succumbed to these youthful admirers -- read Frank Magazine II -- was that they did not wish to give up the illusion of power. He held the door open politely so that Astrid could go first into the animal part of the Barn.

By now Jennifer had pinned her skirt so that her underpants no longer showed, and Amanda had gathered her wits together enough to realize that with Ben's departure, the main reason for having the meeting had evaporated.

"I'm not afraid of raccoons," Amanda said feebly to fill in the silence in the room. "I felt that I could get a better view of the whole situation from the table."

"Of course," said Claude with Gallic sensitivity.

Henry, who had retreated even further into a kind of detachment from the group, gave an inconclusive smile. "Where are we on the agenda?" he asked Jennifer.

"Item 4. Quality of Animal Care in the Barn," she read.

"I'll speak to that," said Amanda. "The reason we're discussing this is not that we have anything to worry about, as our worst enemies, could they see the sanitary condition of the animal quarters, would be impressed. This item was simply to be a report from Ben making the group members aware that they should immediately challenge any slanderous untruth by animal haters."

Jennifer piped up, "They get the kind of quality medical care we humans can only dream about, with the neoconservatives in charge."

"That's enough," Amanda snapped. Since she was a member of the party in power, any suggestion that the animals received better care than humans would not be well received by the Prime Minister.

"We've all had an upsetting evening," said Henry. "Maybe we should adjourn now and calm down."

"I'll have to wait for David and Astrid to come back to lock up, though," Amanda said. "Is there any other business we should discuss before then?"

"Isn't Astrid the woman you mentioned before?" asked Claude. "We could perhaps have her on television to give us visibility. She's very striking. She has a lovely skin."

"Yes," agreed Amanda, deciding not to tell him, poor naive male that he was, that Astrid's translucent complexion had to be painstakingly applied every morning. "She wants to break into television very badly. But TV spots are so expensive."

"What about community television?" said Claude.

"That's not expensive at all," broke in Jennifer. "They have vegan programs that I often watch. Why couldn't Ben do a TV spot? He's closest to the animals."

"No, no," said Amanda peremptorily, unwilling to give Ben more visibility than he already had. "We can't have someone with his arm in a sling and bruises on his face representing us. People might ask what happened to him! Of course it wasn't coony's fault," she said, to mollify Jennifer.

Jennifer was troubled by this casual dismissal of Ben, although she too had been impressed by Astrid's regal manner.

"But Ben has done a wonderful job with the animals," she retorted, refusing to look at Amanda. "It would be nice for him to have some public credit. Look at how neat the Barn is, and how well fed the animals." She was warming to her subject when the door to the animal quarters burst open and David entered followed closely by Astrid.

"I'm disgusted with the condition of the animals," David stated in a loud voice. "What has this group been doing? The seal looks half dead, the cod's tank is a disgrace, and the bison has a sore on its shoulder. I'll have to report these conditions to the Humane Society."

The Grizzly Group looked at him in horror. What was he talking about? Ben always kept the Barn and the animals in excellent condition, didn't he?

"David asked me to check out the cod's tank," Astrid reported righteously, "and it was dirty, with dirty water in it. The water was so dirty I could hardly see the cod. It was hardly moving; it must be sick."

Amanda bristled at their rebuke. "That's ridiculous," she snapped. "The last time I saw the cod's tank, it could have come directly out of an ad in Better Homes and Gardens." She didn't mention that she hadn't been near the tank for weeks and that she hadn't seen that magazine for years.

The others nodded in agreement with Amanda's declaration

primarily as an act of loyalty, because the last visit to the animals by Claude and Henry had preceded even Amanda's; Jennifer, in fact, had never been near the tank in the far corner of the Barn because when in the Barn she was always waylaid by the Bison, or by the Seal diagonally opposite which she had named "Sealypoo."

Their comments enraged David, who knew they must be lying. He reflected to himself with some distaste that such loyalty to a cause produced the kind of blind party discipline passionately defended that he opposed in the privacy of caucus.

"The cod," he said, "is the lucky one. The bison has an open festering sore on its shoulder. There's something wrong with its right eye, which its drooping eyelid can't conceal. It looked at me beseechingly, as if to suggest it would do anything to be somewhere else."

At this comment, Amanda made a production of rolling her eyes to the ceiling to show her contempt.

David ignored her. "The pen hasn't been cleaned for God knows how long. I choked on the smell. As for the seal, at first I thought it was dead, it lay so still beside the pool. Its glossy skin looks matted and dull."

Claude began to drum his fingers on the table in exasperation at David's hyperbole.

"I could go on, but I'll wait to report what I've seen to the House of Commons when it meets again next week. I can do no other," David said pompously, not realizing that that phrase came from Martin Luther as he fastened his 95 theses on the church door at Wurtemberg.

Astrid was nodding vigorously at David's eloquence, anxious to impress him with her zeal.

Amanda, eager to change the subject, suddenly turned to Astrid. "We're thinking about doing a TV spot about animals next week," she said coolly, "but I suppose now you wouldn't be interested. We need someone who loves animals."

"I love animals," stated Astrid, startled at this change in the direction of communication.

"Then you won't want to see them having to put up with dirt and disease, will you Astroid," retorted David, realizing what Amanda was up to.

"The name is Astrid," she told David with aloofness.

"Whatever it is, I can't see how anyone could be a public defender of this group after they've seen the cruel and insensitive way their animal charges are treated." David was working himself into a rage.

"Cruel and insensitive are strong words," Astrid declared calmly.

"You will have to live with your conscience if you join this

group," David almost shouted.

Astrid turned to face David directly. "I think the condition of the animals was well above what one would find in your average zoo. Didn't you notice that the bison's cut had been treated with ointment? As for the seal," and here she was surely grasping at straws, "surely you know it's hibernation season for seals and they always look dopey at this time."

Nobody in the room could recall if seals hibernated, and if they did, whether this was the season.

"One more thing," said Astrid sweetly. "On reflection, there is nothing wrong with the cod or its tank. The light was low in the corner -- fish don't like too much illumination in the evening -- so naturally the water and the tank itself looked dark. The cod was quiet because it was resting."

"Thank you, Astrid, for speaking these simple truths," Amanda said fervently, hoping incidentally that David hadn't noticed that actually there were no lights at all in that part of the Barn. "Could you drop by my office tomorrow so we can talk about your television performance?"

"Of course," said Astrid.

"I think you're all mad," screamed David. "Mark my words. You'll hear more about this!" He started to leave the room, but was stopped by Astrid's voice.

"It's your word against mine," she called after him in a composed voice. "I'll deny any statement of yours suggesting inhumane treatment of the animals, and you might as well know that I'll remind everyone who cares to listen that a red-neck from Alberta like you is, to say the least, an implausible defender of lesser beings."

David turned to glare at her, then marched out the door.

Amanda looked at Astrid with admiring eyes, seeing a politician in the making, but she didn't say anything.

"Why don't we organize a little work party for the weekend to tidy up the Barn a bit?" said Henry mildly.

"Good idea," said Claude. "Nothing but the best for the animals." They all nodded in agreement, as if they often did such extracurricular work.

Jennifer lingered behind the others after they had locked up and left the Barn, worried about the injured raccoon who might not be able to look after himself. She looked up into the dark trees around her, but couldn't see any animal in distress. For the next week she made a point of putting out a bowl of water and carrots behind the Barn for the raccoon, but she didn't know if he visited them. On several days the carrots were gone, so she chose to believe, in her optimistic way, that he had.

Astrid Falls to the Occasion

As Astrid drove toward the television studio for her interview with talk show host Harry Punchup, she tried to remember all the instructions and advice that the members of the Grizzly Group had poured over her. The group knew that putting Astrid in the lion's cage with Harry Punchup was a high risk procedure -- he was known for eating up and spitting out naive guests -- but they also had observed her composure under duress when attacked by David Wrong, and knew that Punchup had an eye for a pretty figure. He often invited his more attractive interviewees out after the show for what he called a nightcap. They had instructed Astrid to look her best, which she now did in a low cut red satin dress with matching red shoes. In their mind's eye, Astrid had replaced Ben as their intermediary with the public.

Jennifer alone was somewhat concerned about their new public relations person; she privately thought that Astrid didn't give a fig about animals, and didn't even know the difference between an African and an Indian elephant. But after her botched "Save the Earthworm" campaign she lacked the nerve to express her fears.

The Group's advice was far ranging. Astrid was given several jokes that put both animals and humans in a good light. She was warned that any observations about Japanese whaling should contain not the slightest hint of racism. Henry gave her a list of all the great people in history who had been vegetarians taken from a comprehensive source that correctly included Hitler. Amanda presented a mind-numbing inventory of all the species that had been wiped out by men, many of whose names Astrid had trouble pronouncing and most of whom she had never heard. Claude described to her in rather too much detail the suffering of geese force-fed daily so that their livers could grace the plates of insensitive humans as pâté.

As Astrid nervously checked her watch while waiting for a red light to change, she tried to remember whether whalers were Korean or Chinese or Japanese. Was it the hairy or the hoary marmot who was in danger? In danger of what? Was a ovolactovegetarian allowed to eat cheese? Her mind was aswirl with nuggets of information. By the time they had collided and changed places with each other in her brain, they had become what the CIA would label disinformation to bamboozle one's opponent.

Astrid had planned to arrive at the television station with half an hour to spare. She wanted time to make sure her makeup was perfect -- but to her dismay, she found that the streets around the studio had all been blocked off for, of all things, a circus parade. It featured three ponderous elephants (did their large ears mark them as Indian or African?), a tiger that appeared to be drugged in a tiny cage on the back of a truck, and a handful of red-bottomed monkeys

inspecting their genitalia and swinging from ropes inside a large enclosure balanced on a large slow-moving float. When she finally found a parking space three blocks away, there were only seven minutes before the start of her interview.

Punchup was at his most aggressive as he wondered if this herb-eating babe was going to arrive on time. Luckily, she burst through the door with one minute to spare, threw her coat on a corner chair and, gasping for air, plunked herself down opposite Punchup. He noticed appreciatively that she was indeed a babe, not one of the earth-mother types with long skirts that tended all too often to present themselves to argue good causes.

When the starting light came on at 8.00 o'clock, Punchup, as was his custom, asked his guest to say a few words about herself and her mission.

Astrid smiled as best she could while still panting from having run up four flights of stairs and began, after taking a large breath, "First of all, I want to thank you, Mr Pushover, for having me...."

"Punchup," he interrupted her brusquely. Pushover was the worst possible name to apply to Punchup.

Astrid gulped, took another deep breath, and then described her perfume and cosmetic boutique, giving its name and address in case anyone was interested, and then her concern for animals.

"I've always loved animals," she gushed while Punchup, noting that he was off-camera, rolled his eyes upward. "I used to help my uncle feed the newborn calves on his farm. Each had its own little house, and they got lots of food."

"Veal calves?" Punchup asked, startled.

"I guess so," she said. "I used to take them grass. They loved it. My uncle treated them royally."

Punchup, refraining from going directly to the jugular because the program had 25 minutes yet to go, said mildly "I wonder if the calves thought of your uncle as kind?"

"Of course," said Astrid complacently. As the discussion proceeded, it was evident that Astrid didn't know that longevity was a word no veal calf ever bothered to learn.

"What are your feelings about the whaling industry?" Punchup asked eventually.

"Our group is vehemently opposed to whaling," she said. "Asian whaling." Then she hastened to add, lest anyone might think there was a racist basis to her comment, "American whalers used to be a real problem too, of course. Just think of Henry Belville and Mopey Dick."

Punchup, unable to restrain himself, interjected "Melville and Moby Dick."

"Yes," Astrid agreed.

"Do you think it's fair to blame all Asians when only one nation is responsible?" he asked, pressing the issue.

"I guess not," she said doubtfully.

"What Asian nation has been infringing whaling rights?" After a long moment, Punchup hinted. "We all know about Pearl Harbour of course?"

Astrid's discomfiture was now obvious to even the least observant viewer. The horrible thought passed through her mind, which she quickly rejected, that all Asians looked alike, so her confusion was understandable.

"Mr Putdown," she said, deciding in desperation to plunge ahead, "I don't think we should be too hard on the Koreans because whaling is an important part of their Hindu tradition."

Punchup, tired of correcting her inability not only to think straight but to remember his name, decided to retaliate.

"Ms Gastric, it's NOT the Koreans who whale and they're NOT Hindus."

Astrid blanched. She was now in even more difficulty as there were only two choices left, and she had no idea which was correct. She remembered that Singapore was mainly Chinese, so she assumed it must have been Chinese who bombed Pearl Harbour. She hadn't even noticed that Punchup had addressed her as Ms Gastric. All she could think of was that she had completely forgotten the name of her adversary.

"Of course Korean was a slip of the tongue, Mr Porkpie," she laughed lightly. "Our group feels that the Chinese should be slowly weaned away from their barbaric -- she corrected herself -- historic practices."

"Do you mean foot-binding?" he asked.

"No," answered Astrid. "I mean their callous pursuit of the noblest animal in the ocean for the sake of some tasteless blubber."

By now, Punchup was having the time of his life, smirking at the man in the control room who was giving him a thumbs-up signal to indicate that this interview could be the highlight of his year. After Astrid, with more prodding, finally settled on the Japanese as the whalers, he changed the subject. In fact, he was feeling a bit sorry for her because she was, he could not help noticing, a well-built babe. He decided to throw her a soft question to put her at her ease.

"Now Astrid, not all of our listeners know about the many famous historic figures who have been vegetarians. Perhaps you could name a few for them?"

Astrid's mind went blank, until she suddenly recalled that Teddy Roosevelt had created the Teddy Bear, so he must have liked animals. "Teddy Roosevelt," she announced, and then, thinking that his

relations, his children, would probably have been vegetarians too, "and Franklin Roosevelt his son, both very famous. They used to go to the woods to look at bears and their other animal friends. And Hitler," she recalled from the list Amanda had given her.

Punchup let out a sardonic laugh. "Teddy Roosevelt probably shot and stuffed more animal heads than any other leader in the world."

Astrid was about to say that shooting animals and being a vegetarian were not the same thing, but she decided to let that pass. She shifted uneasily in her seat, wondering when the interview would end.

By this time, Punchup was unclear whether he should allow Astrid one final chance to redeem herself, or whether he should underline, for his audience to see, how incompetent this supposed expert and friend of animals was. He decided to give her one more chance by asking an easy question -- he wouldn't mind going out for a nightcap with her later.

"What does your group think about force-feeding to produce pâté made from goose liver?"

"We're absolutely against it," stated Astrid, recalling Claude's vehemence. "No one should force geese to eat liver when they are naturally vegetarians. I never liked liver either."

As Punchup seemed to be waiting for her to carry on, she continued, "I can't remember exactly what the liver does, but it certainly affects their digestion and I think gives their feathers a sheen which makes them more valuable in the Middle East."

Punchup reared back slightly in his chair as he realized the number of confusions in her response were more than he could disentangle without getting confused himself.

"I think that's enough for tonight, and I'm sure our listeners will never forget your understanding of the issues," he announced coolly to the camera, before noticing that the man in the recording room was waving frantically that he had another minute to fill before the ads came on at 8.28. Looking past the camera, he noticed Astrid's raccoon coat hanging over the back of the chair near the door.

"On these cold November nights I notice you wear a fur coat," he said smoothly to Astrid.

"Yes," she said, pleased that he had noticed.

"I guess you got it before you were converted to the cause of animal liberation?"

Astrid looked genuinely confused by this remark. "Fur coats are not about animals; they're about fashion," she said. "All of my friends have fur wraps of some sort. The animals don't mind when they're dead. Maybe they're honoured by being worn by important people."

As the camera's red light switched off, Punchup breathed a sigh

of relief. He found Astrid's wild answers disconcerting, but he still liked the way she looked. He had planned to ask her up to his apartment for a nightcap, but decided that a noisy bar might be better where other men could admire his date.

"Do you want to come to the Lion and Peacock Bar for a drink?" he asked her. "It's pretty noisy, but you'll be able to tell your friends that you've been to the best-known hangout in town of media celebrities. I'll point them out to you." He liked to think of himself swinging into any bar with a gorgeous dame on his arm.

"Yes, I'd love that" said Astrid, forgetting the stress of the past half-hour and hoping that she had made another conquest -- this time of an even more important man than David Wrong.

Two hours later, a somewhat tipsy Astrid planted a mushy kiss on Punchup's cheek as he opened her car door for her. She had enjoyed herself, but had hoped for a longer evening.

"I'll be in touch," said Punchup as he waved goodbye, reassuring Astrid that this was probably the beginning of both her television career and a new relationship. She drove slowly home in a drunken fog, hoping she wouldn't encounter a police car.

As Astrid pushed open her apartment door, the phone was ringing. That will be Amanda, asking about the interview, Astrid thought. I wonder how she liked it? She rushed to answer it, but was too late. Instead, she threw her fur coat on a chair, pulled off her red dress and fell into bed exhausted, not bothering even to take off her makeup.

In spite of her tiredness, Astrid's adrenalin was still flowing so strongly that she couldn't fall asleep immediately. She toyed with the idea of taking a third Valium, but remembered vaguely one of the two-sentence medical advisories in the paper that either said this was very dangerous, or not to worry about it. She closed her eyes with her mind a torment of confusing messages abetted by the large number of Singapore Slings and Pink Ladies she had consumed in her attempt to prove to Punchup that she could knock them back as well as the guys could. Alternately she was depressed about her interview performance, and then elated because surely Punchup would not have been so friendly if she had disgraced herself. He had said that he would get in touch and his reason for not inviting her back to his apartment as she had anticipated, knowing his reputation, was clearly valid. After all, you don't invite your new amorata to your place on the first date when the wallpaperers haven't finished the renovations.

A Committee Meeting Best Forgotten

Astrid stumbled to the phone the next morning, wondering why anyone would call at such an ungodly hour before she noticed that

it was ten-fifteen.

"Hello, Astrid, this is Jennifer," the voice said. "I tried to get you at the boutique but Helen said you hadn't arrived yet. She was a little worried. Anyway, now that I hear your voice, I know you're all right." (Actually, Jennifer thought that Astrid's voice was somewhat hoarse, and her tone petulant, but this didn't seem the time to pursue those points).

"The Grizzly Group is meeting this afternoon at six. Do you think you can make it? We'll have veggie sandwiches and that vegetable cocktail you said you liked." (Astrid grimaced as she remembered the concoction, which reminded her of the overpowering smell of cooking cabbages in her childhood on the wrong side of the tracks).

"Yes, I can make that. I guess the group wants to discuss further TV appearances? I've got some ideas of my own."

"Well," replied Jennifer, "that's probably the subject but I haven't received the agenda yet from Amanda. I do know that everyone said they were going to watch the interview. I missed it myself because I had to prepare for the annual SPCA meeting. I'm running for secretary, you know. Anyway, see you tonight. Bye."

Astrid headed for the bathroom where she noticed a stranger in the mirror that reminded her of how she had looked in the mornings when she had been part of the bar-hopping scene -- a period of her life fortunately behind her. She applied cleansing cream generously to her face, grimacing at its lopsidedness with one fake eyelash missing. After a shower which gave her the illusion of feeling normal until she stepped out of the shower stall, she grabbed a mug of black coffee. She drank it while phoning Helen to explain her lateness.

"This morning was the only time the dishwasher repairman could come," she said. "Sorry I forgot to tell you."

Astrid locked up the boutique at five-thirty, half an hour before she had to be at the meeting. She was still a bit disoriented, partly caused by her hangover she assumed, but partly also because Helen had had a funny smirk on her face nearly all day. As well, a number of her faithful customers seemed to be either more formal than usual, or exaggeratedly effusive. I'm sure it's all in my mind, she thought, promising herself that she would never again have more than two drinks a night, especially without food.

She strolled toward the Parliament Buildings in an attempt to clear her head and come up with suggestions about her future television performances. She was unaware that the group was already meeting in advance of her arrival. Amanda's FAX to the group members had described the meeting as a crisis event to respond to the incredible damage to their crusade caused by Astrid's foolish statements.

Amanda began the session by making sure that everyone present

had seen the TV program and read Geordie Truthteller's satirical description in the paper. They all had, despite Jennifer's comment to Astrid. Jennifer wouldn't have missed it for anything. She was pleased at her comeuppance because Astrid had threatened her place in the group. Also, she couldn't help admiring the skill with which both Punchup and Truthteller had skewered her. (Was skewered an acceptable vegan word?) On the other hand, her ongoing reading in the Jain religion made it difficult for her to voice any anger toward a fellow being, even a human one. She decided not to offer any public criticism of Astrid.

"I now understand why the church in Quebec so long opposed the giving of the vote to women," said Claude pretentiously.

Amanda was livid at this. "Next thing you'll be defending the Inquisition," she snapped.

Claude pursed his lips.

"I think Punchup is a smartass bully," said Henry, "and Truthteller is a scurrilous reporter who should have remained with the gutter press in the UK that delights in reporting salacious details of vicars and choir boys."

"Astrid will be here in a few minutes," Jennifer piped up. "What are we going to tell her? She's expecting us to discuss more TV programs with her as star." She allowed herself a snort at this.

Amanda gasped, her jaw dropping so far at this information that Henry couldn't help thinking of his dental appointment next day.

Claude said, "We've got to take some of the responsibility ourselves. After all, it was our idea to turn her into the public face of our group. We should have known that putting her in the lion's den -- (Jennifer thought this an unhelpful metaphor) -- with Punchup was a recipe for the fiasco that the reptilian journalist lingered over in the paper.

Amanda, now realizing that the group would be unwilling to support a blanket attack on Astrid, spluttered, "But, but, but... did that idiot perfume-monger really have to take a fur coat to the interview? It wasn't that cold out."

"The cameraman must be a hunter," Henry said. "He lingered on the coat for what seemed like hours while Astrid babbled on trying to justify her view of animals. Saints preserve us."

"Why don't we discuss the fur coat with her," suggested Claude. "That will be enough. Then we won't have to hear her justifying her ridiculous answers to Punchup's questions."

"Good idea," said Henry.

As a consensus on this idea seemed to be emerging, there was a knock on the door and Astrid entered, her face somewhat pale but nevertheless ready to beam if congratulations should be offered, or frown at unfair criticism. After hanging her fur coat on the coat

rack, she settled down on the only empty chair. She sensed that where she was sitting at the end of the table could be a witness box for grilling the accused.

"Did anybody see how I handled Punchup last night?" she asked, taking the bull by the horns. "He's a real tough interviewer but he told me afterward that he thought this show would be the highlight of the season." She looked around uncertainly when no one spoke.

Finally Amanda, breathing heavily and pointing to Astrid's coat, growled "Can you assure us that that coat is made of fake fur, Astrid?"

"I wouldn't think of such a thing. It's made of the finest raccoon fur that money can buy." That, at least, was what her one-time admirer, a third officer in the Nigerian embassy, had told her prior to their heading off for a weekend together at Montebello.

Amanda said angrily, "Don't you understand, Astrid, that our group, and all supporters of animal rights, are totally opposed to fur coats."

"Oh," said Astrid. "I thought it was only eating meat that was wrong."

"Do you think that the raccoons who once wore the fur that now adorns you simply grew themselves another coat when you took theirs?" Henry demanded rather caustically. "Do you confuse it, for example, with sheep shearing?"

Astrid was beginning to realize that her TV career was less likely than she had hoped.

"Why are you all against me when I worked so hard to get ready for the interview..." she began plaintively, when Ben burst into the room.

"Who let the bear out?" he shouted. "He's eaten the cod and knocked over her tank. I just have to be away for a couple of days -- I always have a reaction to tetanus shots -- and the animals in the Barn are half crazy with hunger."

"Jennifer, didn't you arrange for somebody to take Ben's place while he was off duty?" Amanda demanded.

Jennifer's jaw did not drop open quite as much as Amanda's had earlier, but that was only because she had a smaller face. "I just completely forgot," she apologized. "I'm so sorry. I had to attend the SPCA meeting, and then I'm involved with the vegan group that's planning to demonstrate outside all the butcher shops in Ottawa. And then..."

Amanda interrupted her. "We can't carry on this meeting," she snapped. "Last night was the greatest public humiliation I've suffered since I became an MP! Ben's nose is still swollen. The cod has gone to the afterlife. You, Jennifer, completely failed to carry out a simple task. Claude, you had the gall to suggest that women

should not have received the vote just because Astrid made an ass of herself."

Astrid shrank down into her chair, several tears making rivulets in her pancake makeup. Jennifer tried to speak but her voice failed her, mostly because she didn't know what to say. Henry, who had not yet been singled out for Amanda's scorn, tried to calm the meeting by going to the refrigerator and bringing out the veggie sandwiches and the cabbage-smelling drink.

"Let's take a break," he said.

"I'm going to Burger King," Ben announced after looking at the sandwiches. "I'm sick of watercress." He turned and marched out of the room.

"Wait for me, Ben," called Astrid. "I'll come with you. I've had enough of a group that can't distinguish between wearing a fashionable coat and eating sirloin steaks." The drama of her departure was somewhat minimized by the fact that she put her arm in the wrong sleeve of the coat, which made her appear to be walking backwards.

"Would somebody like to vote we adjourn?" asked Jennifer. (Maybe they'll have the salad bar at Burger King, she thought hopefully.)

Claude, still smarting from Amanda's criticism, barked "I believe terminate, not adjourn, is the word you're looking for. I do so move."

Amanda said. "Listen, Claude, I know that from the beginning you've been nothing more than a spy for the Quebec Separatist cause in this group. You've got about as much concern for animals as you Separatists" -- she spat out the word -- "have for Canada. You're not leaving this group. The group is leaving you. You are expelled under Beauschene's Rules of Order." Neither of them had the foggiest idea what Beauschene's rules were, but Amanda was exhilarated to bring a French name to the expulsion of Claude. Claude shoved the paper plate of sandwiches aside, including his half-eaten one with sprouts straggling from the rye bread. He left briskly, returning a moment later to get his forgotten briefcase, just in time to hear Henry attacking Amanda for turning this non-partisan group into a bunch of lackeys to promote her own career in the liberal party.

"David Wrong was right," he declared, (he felt that in other circumstances these words could have begun a Laurel and Hardy skit), "when he said in the House the other day that the amount of principles behind this group, and particularly your leadership of it, would scarcely cover the bottom of a thimble."

He finished his sandwich, swilled a bit of the vegetable juice in his mouth to remove any watercress bits from his front teeth, and strode out of the room as Claude had done. When he too returned for his briefcase a moment later, Amanda was hunched over the table while

Jennifer tried to comfort her.

"What do Boswell's Rules say about a quorum?" she asked Amanda to divert her mind from the angry ambience in the air. "Is two enough for a quorum?"

"It's not Boswell," Amanda snapped. "It's Beauschene, and he says I can do whatever I bloody well please."

Let History Decide

Jennifer should not have been allowed to make the punch for the Christmas gathering of the Grizzly Group several weeks later, because, as a teetotaler, she had no idea how much gin to add to the ginger ale and fruit juices. She decided that a mixture made up of about one-third gin would be about right; she had read somewhere that gin didn't taste of much, so she wanted to show the others that she at least knew enough to add it.

As the members trooped into the Barn one by one and hung up their coats, with the exception of Jennifer they were all aware that the "party" could easily provide farcical material for Frank Magazine, now in its third decade. Each felt like a voyeur, wondering whether enough spurious bonhomie could be mustered to cover up the ill-temper of the previous working meeting of the group. Claude and Henry had discussed having no further meetings at all, but Amanda, who liked "closure", had insisted that they come to this December "party."

Jennifer thought, too, that the gathering itself was a bit of an oxymoron (although she wasn't sure that this was the right word) following the Prime Minister's announcement the day before appointing Amanda the new Minister of Agriculture.

After leaving the swearing-in ceremony with the Governor-General, Amanda had blithely told reporters, "My mandate is to increase the sale of pork to the Americans, which fits perfectly with my background and ambition."

"But surely your past supervisory position with the House Animals will inhibit your agricultural work?" a woman reporter who was herself a vegan had asked her. "Will you be able to carry out your new responsibilities?"

"Just watch me," Amanda had snapped, pushing past the woman. She had not forgotten that a former Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau, had used exactly the same phrase at the time of a Quebec crisis in the early 1970s.

The atmosphere in the keeper's room was somewhat strained when Amanda arrived last. Claude and Henry, who had helped themselves to punch, were discussing Amanda's promotion and, since this was their third festivity of the afternoon (called "Seasonal" rather than "Christmas" for multicultural correctness), their tongues were somewhat loose and their sentences intermittently incoherent. They

stopped to look at Amanda who had also been to several Seasonal gatherings.

"Hello all," Amanda said in a forced cheery voice as she pulled up a chair at the table where Jennifer had arranged the four plates of catered sandwiches and goodies. "I've been so busy I've hardly had a chance to turn around." The others joined her around the table, but didn't return her greeting. There was an awkward pause, finally broken by Jennifer.

Raising her glass of carrot juice and ginger ale, she announced, "Here's to Amanda's success in her new Cabinet position". She had decided that to indicate the exact nature of the new portfolio would detract from the hoped-for good humour of the occasion.

Claude, however, still smarting from Amanda's savage criticism of his membership in the Separatist Party, raised his glass in a cynical salute.

"Bully beef for you, Amanda," he said. "If anybody can increase pork sales to the Yankees, I guess you're the one to do it. I'm sure you'll be able to overcome your vegetarian instincts when you get into your chauffeur-driven cars and your first class seats on Air Canada." He took a big gulp from his glass.

Henry, noticing the flush on Amanda's cheeks, intervened.

"Really, Claude, you Separatists have been in parliament for nearly two decades now. Your predecessors are living high on the hog, if you'll forgive the expression, on their Government of Canada parliamentary pensions. Don't dress down Amanda for hypocrisy because the last thing you Separatists want is to have your bluff called. You don't even live in Hull any longer, and you seem to have taken a shine to Bette Bronco, even though she's the most unilingual member of our party."

Claude was considering how to answer this tirade when the door opened and Astrid, Ben and David Wrong burst in.

"We're crashing your party," David declared cheerfully. Claude for one was glad for this intrusion which averted his reply to Henry.

There weren't enough chairs for them to sit in, so the three stood in a bunch at the end of the table looking down at the others. Astrid, who was already tipsy, took off and hung her raccoon coat on the coat rack.

"Let's all drink to Porky Amanda," she declared, like Ben and David grabbing a mug and helping herself to the punch. "Amanda, I'm letting you know right now that my respect for animals will mean that no pork chops will ever pass my lips. How's that for helping your new cause?" She gave Amanda as nasty a look as she could muster.

David, whose triumphant little smile never once left his face throughout the whole party, so delighted was he to see the total disarray of the animal lovers, said sweetly as he eyed the catered

sandwiches, "Oh, I see that this time you ordered mixed sandwiches with the roast beef."

Jennifer leapt up in horror. She had ordered the food, but it suddenly occurred to her that when she had informed the catering service that it was for a small get-together to honour the new Cabinet Minister, the chef must automatically have assumed that meat sandwiches were a necessity.

Biting into one, David laughed, "My God, pork sandwiches too. How appropriate, Amanda. How quickly you have responded to your new position."

"I'm so sorry," Jennifer blurted out, glancing out at the animals in the Barn as if they would somehow know of her indiscretion. She hurried around the table, intending to sweep the offending sandwiches into the waste paper basket (which she would later transfer to the bear and the wolf -- waste not, want not) to show that at least she had some standards. She looked at Amanda for support, but was aghast to see her chewing on a beef sandwich.

"Oh, let's forget all that animal liberation nonsense on this special occasion," she slurred, seeing Jennifer's expression.

Jennifer was struck dumb. She looked at each of the others for backing, but found only a glimmer of it in Henry, ever the peace-maker; he ostentatiously gazed at each sandwich in turn so that he could pick an uncontaminated one.

Gradually the gathering lost focus. Claude began singing one of the revolutionary off-colour songs in French which made fun of the English and which the Separatists often sang at the end of Caucus meetings. He had completely failed to notice Jennifer's discomfiture or Amanda's retro munching.

Ben, who had heard from David Wrong and Astrid about the fiasco of the previous meeting, rejected the idea of himself being a peace-maker, and said, with a silly smirk on his face, "I'm collecting money from the Friends of Animals group and wonder which of the hypocritical beef eaters would like to contribute."

Amanda, so inebriated that she couldn't see the contradiction between roast beef sandwiches and animal liberation, said "Put me down for a tax-deductible fifty bucks." She then lurched unsteadily to her feet, sensing incorrectly as it turned out, that the time had come for her ritual Christmas/ Seasonal speech. Her new portfolio had already given her a somewhat pompous air, but this was undermined by her unsteadiness and difficulty in finding the right words.

"I want to thank you all for being so supportive and helpful as members and friends of the Save the Grizzly Group," she began. "As you all know, your great efforts have given our little group a wonderful reputation as principal supporters of our friends and

fellow beings, the animals who shared, in their own way, our task of representing the various living creatures, humans and others, who populate this glorious land. And now, I hope, given my new responsibilities, you will support me with the same vigour, enthusiasm and non-partisanship as I go about my responsibilities as a Minister of the Crown." She had intended to add "to increase the sale of meat products to our allies in the United States of America," but she decided on glancing at Jennifer that she would omit this.

David, open-mouthed in awe at this brilliant volte face of another politician, strode over to Amanda to give her a big hug, laughing as he did so and stating, "We in the Reform Party will be with you, Amanda, as long as we can keep the vegans at bay."

In the process David brushed past Astrid who, already unsteady on her feet, fell sideways against the table with a bump. The group looked at her with dismay. David leaned over to help her regain her balance while Amanda stood back to give him room; she felt that the arm he put around Astrid's waist lingered longer than was necessary, and appeared firmer than the simple offering of assistance justified. Astrid's tipsy smile as she did nothing to release herself from David's hold suggested that Amanda's suspicions were justified.

Astrid's tumble had been a fortunate accident (she had been too relaxed to hurt herself) because it distracted everyone from the accusations they had been hurling at each other. Henry, now rising to his feet to present a final toast, was able to use the speech he had prepared in advance, rather than one aimed at soothing angered feelings. (He had not prepared the two speeches politicians awaiting the vote count in their ridings do).

"Let's drink a toast to ourselves, our experiment in introducing animals into the House of Commons, our taking wonderful care of them in this beautiful Barn (he ignored the cod who had been terminally taken care of), in general the publicizing of the rights of animals and in particular the need for the Y2Y corridor--all have been a great success. We have done wonders! We have accomplished great things! Now, as some members of our group are preparing themselves for somewhat different ways to serve the public good," -- all eyes fixed on Amanda at this point who was studying her nail polish, an expensive Christmas red supplied by Astrid's boutique -- "I think it is time to disband our enterprise. There is a time for every great venture to begin, and a time for it to end. This is that time."

"What about the animals!" Jennifer gasped in a choking voice.

Henry started, having been carried away by his own rhetoric. "I've already thought of that," he replied untruthfully. "Why," he said with a long pause between each animal to give him time to think, "the beaver, the seal, the bear, the bison, the cod and the wolf can

all be returned to their natural habitat to live out their full lifespan."

David let out a snort. "The cod and the bear are now one," he reminded Henry. "And the best habitat for a bison is on a bison ranch where our furry friends will be readied to become bison steaks. Is that what you had in mind, Henry?"

Before Henry could answer, David, who had the politician's knack of holding the floor well in hand, continued, "As for the bear and the wolf, they've been so molly-coddled by you vegetarian idealists that they can only survive if they're provided with a keeper and a credit card to buy meat. The tax payers of Canada will love that."

Henry saw his position as hero rapidly ebbing away, so he tried to recover the leading role in winding up the group that he had hoped to play.

"You didn't let me finish, David," he said rather petulantly. "Surely you've heard of the group Friends of Abducted Grazers (FAG) in our very own province. They buy up bison from ranchers and look after them in a bison paradise in northern Alberta. As for the bear, a friend of mine who works for the circus can look after our feathered friend."

Jennifer interrupted Henry this time. "Bears aren't feathered," she snapped. "And circus animals are as cruelly treated as you can imagine. Taught with whips and chains to do stupid tricks to be gawked at by ignorant people."

"Please let me finish, Jennifer" said Henry. "I didn't mean for the bear to become attached to a circus. My friend knows how a bear can be rehabilitated to return to the wild. And he can do the wolf too. Often some wild animals can't be broken into circus life. And the legislation passed four years ago because of public pressure makes it a serious offence to put down recalcitrant creatures. So, you see, every one of your concerns is a red herring."

Henry was ready to stop speaking, feeling that he would end on a high note, when Astrid shouted, "More, more." Not realizing that she was referring to the punch, whose bowl was now depleted, he cleared his throat to carry on with platitudes he had always to hand.

Ben spoke up instead. "Time's up, Henry. We need some rules of procedure here to cut the bafflegab you guys are so good at." Noticing Amanda out of the corner of his eye, he added, "and gals too." Then, looking at Amanda's darkening face, he changed this to "and women too."

"Ben" Amanda said, "You're digging yourself into a deeper hole every time you open your mouth. At the moment, all I can see is the top of your head."

Jennifer banged the table lightly to change the subject. "Shall I write up the minutes of this meeting and a report of our whole House

Animal experiment?" she asked the group.

"Excellent idea," agreed Amanda. "You can circulate them and then I'll send them along to the Speaker and to Hansard."

The others nodded, pleased to let Jennifer do this work.

"And to the National Archives," Amanda added. "Future historians will find in our records perhaps the key episode of social activism in the twenty-first century that eliminated speciesism."

David couldn't resist retorting, "Of course, you must ensure that future scholars are well informed of the rise and fall, sorry, I mean beginning and end, of this short-lived, well-intentioned committee."

Amanda, fearing that the positive vibrations of the committee might be derailed by David's sarcasm which she noted Claude was getting ready to rebut, announced, "Let's end this party on the same happy note that has invariably characterized our meetings."

Several eyes rolled as she continued, "Here's too all of us!" She knocked back the dregs of punch in her glass and waved somewhat vaguely in the direction of the animals, so that they too would be included in her toast.

As the punch bowl was now empty, Jennifer brought another large jug of juice from the refrigerator into which she poured the last half bottle of gin. They all filled their glasses and mugs except for Jennifer, who was still nursing her spritzer, and prepared a series of maudlin salutes.

No one else seemed eager to start the individual salutes, so Henry began,

"Here's to our bear, the friend of us all,
in his lovely old forests he'll sure have a ball."

They all solemnly drank to the grizzly bear, whom they could see through the window snoozing on his stomach, as they would drink to each animal in turn.

Amanda leaned forward next to toast the beaver who was swimming placidly in the pool with the seal beside him:

"To our beaver, for our nation,
Source of pride and affirmation."

Astrid choked a little with the emotion of it all.

Claude, looking as usual for a French connection, chose to honour the seal, as he remembered the ongoing dispute with the government of Newfoundland over the boundary in the Gulf of St Lawrence demarcating Quebec seals from other seals. He began speaking in French until David interrupted him curtly, saying

"There's no simultaneous translation here."

Claude shrugged his shoulders and said,

"Le phoque, bien sûr
has lovely fur

we wish for her
la vie meilleure."

Jennifer was hunting for a word rhyming with "bison", but before she could come up with anything Ben graciously (seeing their past brief discord) spoke up for this animal:

"Here's to the friend of Louis Riel
he's off to the prairies
where all will be well."

Jennifer composed herself to try to give the impression that she had been hoping no one else would choose the wolf (smulf, bulf, gulf?)

"We love you so, dear wolf, and know
It's time for us to let you go."

As she drained her glass, a tear rolled down her cheek as she thought of the wolf free to join up with other wolves and run where she wished: *Women Who Run With the Wolves* was one of her favourite books.

As everyone put down their glasses and mugs and began gathering up their belongings, David took the floor, chanting,

"Here's to the cod tho' we do not know where,
He was eaten by Grizzle the too hungry bear."

"We've finished the punch," Amanda told him coldly, but David would not be shut up.

"We all forgive his natural need,
But fear the cod had not agreed."

"That's enough, David," Amanda insisted. Then, to make sure he couldn't continue, she made an impromptu speech herself.

"We must all spread the good word that the animals are being returned to their natural habitat," she told the group. "As first time members of the House, they've had a stressful time, especially the seal who," (she had had far too much to drink), "has been stationed in the ranks of the Bloc who want to destroy the best country in the world."

She was about to enlarge on this theme when Claude cried, "Cut the crap, Amanda. Come on, let's all go over to the House Christmas reception. It should be in full swing now."

The group filed noisily out of the keeper's room, putting on their coats and hats and scarves as they went. Amanda left with Henry, discussing her new portfolio; Claude walked beside Ben who was wondering what mood Rosa would be in when he finally got home; and David supported Astrid who was unsteady in her high heels. Only Jennifer was left behind, unsure if she was happy or sad. She was certain that the animals would get along much better in their new homes, but she wondered about herself; with Amanda taking on her new position as Minister of Agriculture, she could no longer work for her.

Jennifer knew that her own goal to spend her life working for animals was stronger than ever, but how could she best do this? Should she join some other activist animal group? Or go to university and study biology? She decided to consult with Ben over the holidays about the best way for her to proceed -- she rejected any consultation with Amanda whom she now considered a turncoat, or perhaps, she poignantly considered, maybe just a typical politician.

She thought back over the months that she had worked with the animal group. Had she been a participant at the break-through moment of history when animals began to take their proper place beside human beings in society? Or had this exercise been only one of those fads that rise and fall with rhythmic regularity as movement yuppies migrate from one hip cause to another?

Epilogue

Jennifer, who did decide to go to university, enrolled in a brand new program called Philosophical Biology, looking forward to when she graduated to becoming a full-time activist for animals.

Amanda remained in politics but mostly as a back bencher. Her foray into Agriculture as Minister was curtailed, because despite her protestations that her previous work hadn't been important, too many farmers remembered her behaviour in connection with the Animals in the House movement.

Ben lost his job as keeper at the Barn when the animals were sent to their new homes, but David Wrong was able to have him hired as director for a new Metis group being established with government money to pressure the government for more money and lands for Metis peoples.

David was Agricultural Critic for the Reform party when Amanda was Minister, then ran for the leadership of the Reform Party for a second time. Again he lost to Preston Manning. His disappointment was tempered because he and Astrid had recently become an item.

Astrid and Rosa, who had finally decided to leave Ben, together formed a New Age consulting firm called WOWAM, an acronym for With Or Without A Man. They held frequent popular workshops for three groups of women: those who wanted to get a man, those who wanted to shed a man, and those who didn't care about men, largely made up of lesbians. Astrid, whose boutique business grew in tandem with these sessions, was pleased to be able to offload all her excess stock of NATURE'S OWN in the shedding workshops.

Henry was so disillusioned with politics that he didn't run in the next election, spending his time instead as a visiting professor at several Canadian universities. He enjoyed the cynicism of his academic colleagues, but found their jargon incomprehensible, and was bemused that they valued their personal theories about the

political process more than his own observations about how it actually worked.

Claude also resigned from his party, but made the mistake in his letter of resignation of intimating that the Bloc had used its power primarily to bring new booty to Quebec rather than to seek separation from the rest of Canada. From then on, all his old political allies refused to be seen with him. He and his wife spend their time increasing their life lists of birds seen; their most recent addition has been the rare rufous-necked wood-rail found in a mangrove swamp in Mexico.