

**The Giant Judge  
and  
The Girl Who Didn't Know How**

**A sketch**

**A**t dusk, Carla took a walk down her favorite path through the forest. The incense cedars and beds of pine needles had been warmed by the sun all day, and now they exhaled their fragrance into the chilly air. Carla heard a sharp “crack” from a branch overhead, and then a “thud” from the path before her. A few paces ahead, she found a bird lying on the path. It was struggling to get to its feet. Its wing was broken. She stooped and reached out toward the bird, to pick it up.

“Don’t touch that, it’s filthy,” said a dry, cracked voice, rising from the path behind her.

“It’s hurt,” said Carla, turning toward the voice.

“It’s full of germs that can kill you.” Carla saw the silhouette of a hulking figure, an ogre. As she stepped toward the figure, she saw that he was covered from shoulders to toes in the black robes of a court judge.

“I want to help him.”

“If you must, then, help it without touching it.”

This puzzled Carla at first. She then set about looking for a way to carry the bird back to her shelter without touching it. Finding some fallen pine boughs, she used one to push the bird onto another. The bird lay still upon the bough, hurt and breathing hard, but resting. Carla stooped to take a closer look at him. He had a strong beak, shiny black feathers and sharp claws, large claws for a bird his size, and large tired eyes. His black glance beamed strength, intelligence, and pride.

“I can see you don’t want me to baby you, but please let me help you.” The bird did not try to get away, and Carla dragged him, on the bough, back to her shelter. The Giant Judge followed her silently. She could feel his towering presence at her back as she walked. It never occurred to her that she did not have to do his bidding.

Carla had made her shelter of driftwood. She had anchored two tall logs deep in the sand, and raised them toward the sky. She had lashed a third log, across their tops with vines: the weight-bearing cross-piece. She leaned long pine boughs, with their broken ends in the sand, against this cross-piece, and made a roof. It had taken Carla only an afternoon to build this lean-to shelter. It was just long enough to cover her as she slept, and just wide enough to cover her table – a stump, and her chair – another stump. The lean-to stood in a cove, nestled at the foot of a cliff where the forest met the beach.

Carla dragged the injured bird into the shade of her shelter, resting bough and bird under its roof. She reached her hand toward the injured wing, and then quickly withdrew it. She found a stick and began gently to lift the wing with it. The bird recoiled and cawed with pain.

“Good idea!” taunted the Giant Judge, looming just outside the lean-to. “Poking an injured bird with a stick.”

“I did not poke it. I wanted to lift its wing to see what is wrong. What else could I do?”

The Giant Judge looked at Carla with a blank stare, and made no reply.

Carla left the bird lying on its bough, and returned to the forest to gather food. She returned with a pocketful of seeds, bugs, and even a worm she had found under a rock. Placing all these into an abalone shell, she set them before the bird. The bird hopped off its bough toward the food. It spread its wings to keep its balance. It *cawed* with pain, and dropped onto one side, trembling.

Carla started, and reached her hand toward the bird. Then, she drew it back. “We have got to do something about that wing. Maybe it needs a brace to keep it from moving while it heals.” She looked up toward the Giant Judge. He snarled, but said nothing.

Carla fashioned a little brace from sticks she found on the beach, lashing them together with strands of seaweed. How could she tie the brace to the wing without touching the bird? She puzzled over this question, sitting in the sand. Then, she remembered her gloves.

Carla kept a steamer trunk at one end of her lean-to. It was one of the few things the ocean had shoved onto this island, along with Carla, after the shipwreck. In the trunk were a blanket, towels, a coat, and gloves. Carla made good use of these during the cold nights. Now, she thought, “If I wear the gloves, I won’t really touch the bird. Maybe its deadly germs won’t get through them.” She opened the trunk and donned the gloves.

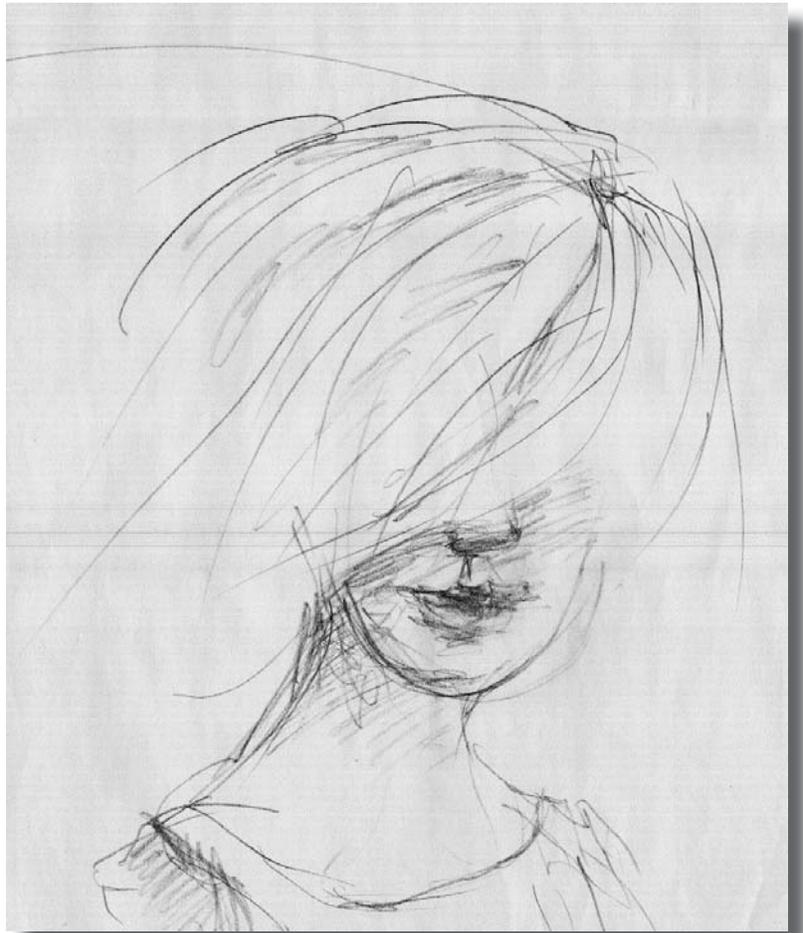
Carla spread the bird’s broken wing and placed it over the brace. Then she tied the brace to the wing with more strands of seaweed. The bird flinched and cawed, but made no attempt to get away. It looked into Carla’s face as though to say, “You must be doing this to help me.” Carla set the bird back down in the lean-to, near its abalone bowl. The bird tried to hop toward the food again, but because of the brace it could not keep its balance. It fell again onto its side with a pained “Caw!”

“Great,” said Carla. “Now you can’t even eat without help. And I don’t even know if the brace is making your wing worse. It looks clumsy and stupid.”

“It is stupid,” echoed the Giant Judge.

Carla left the brace on the wing, for she didn't know what else to do. She fed the bird with her gloved hands, lifting each bit of food to its beak. The bird especially enjoyed the bugs.

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A few days later, Carla removed the brace. The bird spread its wings without wincing, a sign that the injured wing had healed. But Carla saw right away that the injured wing did not have the same shape as the other wing. The injured wing had knit itself back together, but the brace had twisted it into an awkward shape.

“How will it fly with that?” chided the Giant Judge.

Carla knew he was right – she had made a mess of the job – but still she answered curtly, “We’ll just have to see, won’t we?”

That night Carla lay under the lean-to on its open side, leaving the bird on the more protected side where the roof boughs touched the ground. As she began to doze, she could hear the Giant Judge wandering in the woods just behind the lean-to, snapping branches where he stepped, snarling, chewing and snorting just before he swallowed something he had found.

In her dream, she saw herself back at sea. Carla was steering a small sailboat through fierce waves near the rocky shore of this very island. The bird lay, with its twisted wing, in the bottom of the boat. The wind howled and its waves tossed the boat like a twig. Carla peered through the driving rain, looking for a beach where she might land. At last, she saw an inlet with a soft beach sloping to the shore. As she was about to pull the rudder to the left to turn in there, she spied a large black hulk standing right in the center of the beach. “Helllooooo!” she called out to the hulk. “Help me land.”

The Giant Judge returned, “Land!”

“Should I pull left?” shouted Carla.

“Right!” returned the Giant Judge.

Carla pulled the rudder to the right. This pointed the bow away from the inlet and directly across the path of a swelling wave. The boat capsized, throwing Carla and the bird into the sea. As the boat splintered on a rock, Carla awoke to a sharp “crack” and a tortured “caw!”

Awake, she stood to see that, while she had slept, a fierce storm had indeed chastened the little island. While she dreamed, she had rolled out of the lean-to and into the driving rain. A heavy branch, from high in a towering tree, had fallen before the wind. It had fallen onto the lean-to, and it had snapped the cross-beam. The large branch, and the sheltering roof-boughs, fell hard upon the injured bird. When Carla removed the boughs, the drenched bird was trembling, and its wing was bleeding. Broken again. “Oh, my dear bird!” cried Carla, and she really did cry. Just then she remembered her dream. She said, “This comes from trying to please the Giant Judge,” and made a secret promise to the bird.

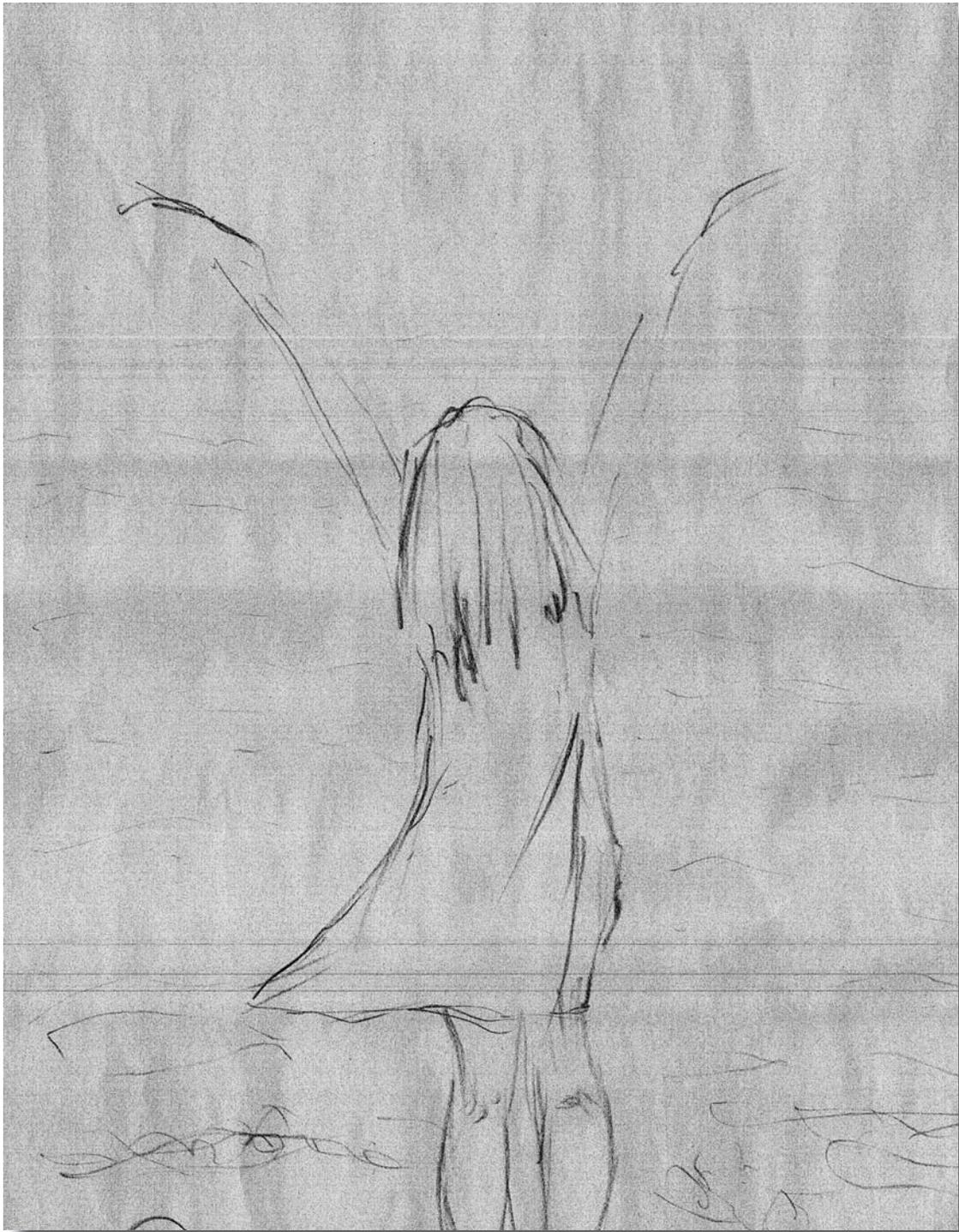
She looked up to see where the Giant Judge had gotten to, but he was gone. He was simply gone, like writing washed from the sand. The ocean's fierce breath had blown the Giant Judge from her dreams. Her dream had blown him from her island. He was gone.

She lifted the bird in her bare hands, holding him gently for a moment to her breast. Then, she found a towel in the steamer trunk, and bound the broken wing to the bird's own body. "This way it will heal back into its natural shape," she whispered.

The storm had broken, and the sun was rising. Carla knew that she had to feed the bird, and help him with his flying, but she would not rush, and she would not look for the Giant Judge to ask if she were doing the right thing.

Today would be different. Carla always had known *what* she needed to do. This morning, she knew *how*.

Carla turned toward the sea. A salty breath caressed her face and blew away her tears.



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