

THE ADVENTURES OF ASHER SVENSON STORY TWO: A FEAST OF FISHES

Lucas Holt, a short story of an adventure
at the seashore.

While camping at the coast,
A young man met a mysterious host,
A pelican full of wisdom and renown,
Whose name and age remain unknown.

After the young man met this pelican,
An epic adventure soon began;
For he was entrusted with an ancient shell,
But precisely why he could not tell.

Nervous and not knowing what to expect,
The young man trembled at the prospect,
That he was chosen for a special task,
A mission for which he did not ask.

Fear gripped his heart, but failed to wrest
Courage and bravery from his chest.
This is the tale of how Asher Svenson
Accepted his peculiar gift and mission.

Asher stood on the beach beholding the vast sapphire sea that lay before him. The largeness of the ocean and all of the plants and various creatures that live deep down in the cold, dark waters was a thought that always fascinated him. He often wished he wasn't prone to seasickness so that he could become a sailor and venture out into the sea and steer a ship that had a large sail, with fellow comrades to accompany him on the journey. He often thought, though, that when he got older his body would change and this desire could become a reality.

Night began to fall, and as the young man stood there gazing at the rosy red sunset, which lay like a rich tapestry against the dark blue ocean, he suddenly noticed a pelican standing over to his right about fifteen yards

away. It stood there still as a statue. Its webbed feet were firmly fitted in the sand, and its head was lifted, straight and steady, as if it were looking for something. Although the pelican seemed rather peculiar, Asher did not make too much of it, for pelicans frequented this beach.

“Perhaps he is just like me, admiring the ocean as the sun goes to rest in its hiding place,” thought Asher. So after the sun had descended and the last hints of pink vanished from the sky, he turned and started making his way back to the camp that he had set up.

The next morning, as Asher was going for a walk on the beach, watching the sun come up the same way it had gone down, he noticed what seemed like the same pelican, standing in nearly the same place as the night before. He wondered whether or not it had even moved, for the pelican stood like a soldier on guard. Shortly after Asher looked at it, however, the pelican flew away into a low-hanging cloud that hovered over the shore, and he could no longer see the curious creature. He was a bit perplexed, finding it somewhat odd that he should see the same pelican once again, but he shrugged his shoulders and continued on. “I must be over thinking things,” he thought.

It was now the third day. A blanket of mist and fog covered the beach, with a lingering smell of rain, and although one could not see the ocean very well, the roaring and crashing waves could be heard miles away. After Asher woke up, he emerged from his tent to start a

fire and cook some breakfast, which consisted of a fish he had caught the night before, two slices of bread, and some bitter tea. As he walked to his woodpile, he looked up, and, behold! There stood the mysterious pelican, its orange beak glowing like a flame against the dark mist. Asher looked at the pelican in amazement. He had an eerie feeling that something was going on after all. He looked intently and noticed something that he hadn't before. Its left wing was fixed in a certain position. It seemed to Asher that the bird was pointing to something, like it was signaling to the young man to look behind where it was standing. Asher turned to look out at the sea, laughing to himself and thinking that he was just seeing things. But then he glanced back at the pelican and its eyes were staring at the young man, and its left wing had not moved. Asher's heart began beating harder when he realized that the pelican was addressing him.

Asher mustered up some courage and began to slowly walk toward the pelican. This mysterious bird really was rather intimidating. Its orange beak blazed against the misty morning air, its eyes a piercing black, its head crowned with a bright yellow. Its wings were sharp and steady, its head was lifted high, its feet firm, and its body was colored in a coat of dark, brownish gray that was both sleek and old. As Asher began walking toward that fair and frightening creature, he looked to where its wing was pointing. The pelican was pointing toward the sandy hill off to the right not far from where it stood. Asher saw the hill then glanced back at the

pelican. The two made eye contact and the pelican gave a nod with its head, affirming that the hill was where it was pointing. Soon Asher started walking over to the sandy hill and the pelican followed, walking beside him.

The two of them walked along, slowly and steadily. Asher became nervous. Questions filled his mind: What is going to happen? What does this pelican want? Should I say something? What are we going to do when we reach the hill?

After a growing discomfort with the silence, Asher began to speak; “Excuse me, but” and before he could finish the pelican cut him off. “Shh!” it hushed. “They must not see us talking to one another.”

Asher’s heart sunk, his face turned a little pale, and his eyes shot forward. Now he was really nervous. What, or rather whom, was this pelican referring to? But rather than speak another word, he heeded the bird’s advice and kept walking. The remaining distance to the foot of the sandy hill felt terribly far.

The two of them finally made it to the foot of the sandy hill. The pelican elongated his neck and lifted his head, looking around as if to make sure all was clear. After a quick survey, he gave a nod and they both began to ascend the hill. It was much steeper than it looked back at the campsite. It took Asher a while to walk up the hill, for after each stride, he slid down half a step on the rolling sand. Finally, they both reached the top. And after another quick look at the surroundings, the pelican took

the lead and walked over to the opposite side of the hill where down about thirty feet stood two trees about ten yards apart, creating a narrow opening through which one could walk. The two trees were the only trees on the entire hill, and their stature and solemnity made it such that they were like two soldiers standing guard, ready in a second's notice for battle.

The pelican led Asher through the stately trees and then they walked another fifteen yards. Soon there came into sight a large grey rock. The rock was about seven feet tall, and its width was around three feet. At the bottom of the rock on the right-hand side there was a little crevice overlaid with two layers of thick, dried moss. The pelican signaled to Asher to remove the moss and look inside the crevice. As the young man removed the moss, he saw a seashell inside the crevice. The seashell was no bigger than the palm of his hand, and it had a grainy, rough texture, lending a sense of antiquity. Then the pelican signaled to Asher to pick up the seashell.

Asher was hesitant, and his hands started to lightly shake as he looked at the seashell then back at the pelican. He felt as though he were about to pick up a piece of treasure, a jewel of inestimable value. It was hard to describe the feeling, but he became very insecure about touching that ancient shell with his hands. He looked back at the pelican, and the mysterious bird gave a nod of reassurance. The young man reached for the seashell and carefully placed it in his left hand with his right hand over the top so as to make sure it would not fall to the

ground. As soon as the seashell was securely in the young man's hands the pelican flapped its wings and flew away.

Asher was perplexed. What was happening? He was beginning to grow faint, partly from being tired and partly from that feeling that one gets when nerves come on and the stomach starts to rumble. It reminded him of the feeling he got as a young boy when he was in school and would get called down to the principal's office: one could be totally innocent, but simply hearing your name over the intercom was enough to arouse a sense of discomfort. Asher slowly sat down, with the seashell still in his hands, wondering what this all meant. He waited there by the large grey rock for about an hour or so, thinking maybe some creature was going to come to him to tell him what to do next, but no animal ever came. The sun was now beginning to set, so he figured he should start to make his way back to the campsite before it got too dark.

The radiant, descending sun filled the sky with a golden, amber hue, which cast down over the surface of the sea, touching the water and creating sharp points of light that looked like shards of glass. Asher stood admiring the sunset and watching the light and water at play. Then he began to make his way back down the hill. He passed between the two martial trees and descended down the sandy slope. He started out in a walk but the steepness of the hill forced him to move his feet quickly. He gently placed the seashell in his shirt pocket and then broke out into a run down the hill. He had the excitement

and adrenaline that comes with adventures. He was still nervous, but nervous with a readiness to embrace whatever may lie ahead.

Soon he returned to where he had set up camp and relaxed for a while under his tent. Then he fixed some dinner, warming up a can of beans over the fire and eating some more bread. Soon it was nighttime and the stars were out and the moon was shining bright. The nighttime sky was like another canopy, a cozy tent that covered the earth.

After he ate and sat for a while, he decided to go to sleep. But he could not sleep. He could not get the pelican and the seashell out of his head. He kept trying to come up with theories for what it all might mean. Why did the pelican choose him to take the seashell? What was the purpose of the seashell? Why was the pelican acting strangely? What was supposed to happen now that the seashell had been obtained?

Asher decided to leave his tent and go for a short walk on the beach to clear his mind. As he was walking, he took the seashell out of his pocket and began looking at it, turning it over in his hands and gazing intently at its shape and texture. Then he remembered he had brought his miniature magnifying glass with him, and he rushed back to the tent to grab it out of his backpack. He hurriedly took out the magnifying glass and began examining the ancient shell more closely. After examining it for a few minutes, he noticed something

strange. He lifted the seashell up and fixed his eyes on its inside curve. There appeared to be some kind of etching on it, like an encrypted message. He had not noticed the etchings earlier in the day because of the brightness of the sun. But under the pale moonlight it became clearer that something indeed was etched on the shell. But what it meant, if anything, the young man did not know.

The etchings looked like scratches or tally marks, with vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines, and there were three sets each having seven marks. It seemed to Asher that these marks were done purposely, with some kind of meaning. He speculated that the shell was a token of sorts, perhaps a pass for admittance, although he was not sure what for. It was now in the small hours of the morning, and soon the young man grew very tired and before he knew it, he was fast asleep. The stars shined on, and the waves roared.

Asher woke up early in the morning to watch the sunrise. It was his favorite part of the day: seeing the sun emerge from its hiding place like a valiant warrior, its bright light casting out the darkness and ascending to its governing station in the heavens, where it would look over the earth and cover it with warmth. When he would get into his philosophical moods, he would often ponder the irony of watching the sunrise while yet not really looking *at* the sun. He would often wonder at the fact that it is the only thing in all of creation that one cannot intently gaze upon.

As he was getting ready to start the fire to cook breakfast, a bird with large wings came flying overhead, circling around and swooping down to the sandy shore. Asher had no doubts: the majestic bird was the pelican he met the day before.

Asher made his way over to the curious creature to inquire about the meaning of the etchings on the seashell. While he was still about ten feet away from the bird, he blurted out, "What is the meaning of the seashell, and what does it say on the inside?"

The pelican's eyes grew large and it began moving its wings, signaling to the young man to keep quiet. In a soft voice it replied, "It is an invitation, and the etchings say Feast of Fishes."

"Aha!" exclaimed the young man. "Why couldn't you have told me this plainly the other day?" he asked.

"It had to be written in code, otherwise who knows who may have seen it?"

"What is this Feast of Fishes?"

"The pelican community of Grishinwa has invited you to be the honorable guest at our weekly Feast of Fishes dinner."

Asher was perplexed, delighted, and a bit nervous all at once. "How was I chosen to be the honorable guest?"

“We keep watch over this shore from the northern fjords of Grishinwa to the southern tip of Tav. Two days ago, it was reported to me that a young man was frequenting the beach near Sewaski Point. The news reported to me was the following:

A rugged youth whose eyes are fair,
Around him lies a certain air,
Like those who dwell in the Great Wood.
We think that he has come from there.

At night he looks up at the stars,
And with his telescope sees Mars.
One time we heard him say aloud,
“A mighty globe which lacks all fears.”

“When I heard this, I thought of the young man whom Mrs. Feathergloss had told me about three weeks ago.”

A look of amazement came across the young man’s face and Asher shouted, “You know Mrs. Feathergloss?”

“Shh!” replied the pelican. “Indeed, indeed, I know Mrs. Feathergloss. There is a pact that was established ages ago between her, the Flying Creature of the Great Wood, and the Pelicans of Grishinwa, that stated we

would be friends and allies in times of peril. The pact has been maintained since its inception. Seldom do we interact, but every now and again there will be communication. When I saw her come out of the Wood near Tav, I knew something must be going on, for rarely does she leave that royal dwelling, especially near the southern edge. But there will be more of this talk later. We must now make our way to the feast.”

The pelican led the young man to where the feast was to be held. About two and a half miles north up the shore and slightly to the east, lay a high-sloping hill full of evergreen trees that descend down to the water’s edge. On the backside of this hill lay the spot they needed to reach. They began making their way north, traversing the sandy ground, and after about a mile and a quarter the beach gave way to a wet, rocky surface. Sunbeams broke through the clouds and shone down, and the wet rocks glistened in the light and looked like large stones of onyx. They followed the shining stones, which curved around like a semi-circle, and then they came to a mossy path that led to the side of the hill they needed to reach. The path then passed into a thicket of trees. They made their way through the trees and then gradually ascended the hill. After about twenty minutes of walking, they eclipsed the top of the high-sloping evergreen hill and passed over to its backside and began slowly walking down. As they were walking down, to the left there was an area that flattened out and dropped down like a small cliff, and on the right side of the wall-like formation was

a narrow opening that led into the side of the hill, such that it was like an underground passageway. The passage was narrow and dark. Asher walked closely behind the pelican, not able to see a thing. Then after a short while a faint glow could be seen, and as they kept walking the light grew brighter and brighter. Soon the passageway opened up and they came into a large room full of pelicans.

A fire was kindled in the center of the cave and next to it laid a pile of fish that was to be cooked for the feast.

Then one of the other pelicans stood up and began to speak. "The time has come! We must not put off the evening's business any longer." Soon after this was said, a pelican came from the back of the room carrying a small scroll. The pelican (who looked to be a leader of some sort) took the scroll and began to read aloud the text written on it, which said the following:

We the Pelicans of Grishinwa, in accordance with the traditions established by our fathers, hereby wish to extend an offer of peace and friendship to a human being, hereby Asher Svenson, to assist and aid in times of peril, that the powers of evil may be defeated.

Asher was confused. "I don't understand," he said. "What is going on? What kind of evil are you speaking of? And why have you chosen me to help you?"

"Do you still not know, friend?" said the Leader. "You have been entrusted with the gift of being able to

understand animals.” A short pause followed, and then he continued,

“You do not have to know why you have been chosen, and even if I told you why, you would not understand. It is not for you to know all things but to trust and accept the gift that has been given you. But remember, it is a gift. If there were some qualification that had to be obtained, you would soon forget that you had been given a gift at all. You would mistake the ability to speak with animals for your own skill and wisdom, and then you would be susceptible to many grave pitfalls.”

Silence filled the cave. The Grishinwa community was waiting to see if the young man would accept the offer written on the scroll. Asher received the scroll into his hands and looked at it slowly. He felt both honored and afraid. He did not feel capable of such a role. And yet, a conviction grew in him that he must accept the offer and be brave.

After careful deliberation, Asher chose to sign the scroll. He dipped his finger in the fish oil, initialing “A.S.” on the document.

The pact was established. There was no turning back.

A chorus of voices broke out, shouts and cheers rang through the halls of the cave.

Inside this remote and hidden cave was much merriment. Wine was being poured, fishes were being consumed, the Song of the Pelican was being sung, and

there was much excitement and talk. But there was also the recognition that an arduous journey lay ahead, and the gravity of what was before them was inescapable. Inside the cave there was the feeling like one gets when watching the sunset: joy and pleasure of beholding something beautiful and delighting in the present moment, but all the while knowing that it will be brief, and that not before long it will be dark.

