



FABLES FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

# BESOP'S FABLES

*Fables for the Third Millennium*

by Barry Daniels

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## AN ORDINARY DAY

### *A Fable for the Third Millennium*

Benny looked into his own eyes as he shaved, and counted his troubles. They buzzed around inside his head like a swarm of angry bees. His youngest son, Michael, needed expensive orthodontistry, and the dentist had warned that ‘right away’ would not be too soon. Benny didn’t even want to think about next year, when his oldest boy headed for college, or the fact that the last decent winter coat his wife Diane had bought was approaching its ninth birthday. And he still could not see how he was ever going to find the money. A raise was out of the question, and so was an advance on his salary. Given the rumours which were circulating at work lately he’d be lucky to keep his job. He could sell his old Chevvy, as

Diane constantly urged him to do, and take the bus to work, but then how would they cope with all the after-school activities for the kids? With hockey games, Soccer practice, Riding lessons, Judo classes, the old car spent little time parked on the driveway. And then even if he sold the car he would be lucky to get half of what the Orthodontist had estimated. A sharp pain in his lower abdomen reminded him that he should have seen the doctor about these recurrent attacks long ago! He could no longer pretend that the pains were getting easier to bear, or that the attacks were coming less frequently. But what if he needed surgery, how was he going to find the money for that? What if it was something which could keep him off work for a long time, or even? ... well, let's not even *think* about *that* possibility. He'd opted out of his company's health insurance plan, needing every penny of his take-home pay just to cover the day-to-day household expenses. In hindsight, that looked like an

exceptionally bad choice on his part, as Diane frequently pointed out to him.

He dressed quickly and walked through the kitchen to the driveway, skipping breakfast once again and trying to ignore the hard glare which his wife directed at his back. The Chevy turned over sluggishly but fired before the battery gave up trying (his neighbour had told him that the last boost he'd supplied was definitely the end of the road) and limped along the freeway into the city.

Arriving late for work he found the office empty, and followed the sounds of activity into the boardroom. This at least was not unexpected. The threat of layoffs had been hanging over his small company for months now, but the faces of his colleagues told him, even before he read the message on the flip chart, that the news was even worse than expected. The company was on the verge of bankruptcy, holding out only until the employees cashed

their final paycheques before filing the papers. Benny picked up the small envelope from the desk by the side of the chart and left the room. There was nothing to stay for, nothing left to discuss. And nowhere to go but home, to try to explain to Diane that even the small paycheque which she so despised was no longer available to sustain them.

Crossing the bridge out of the city his engine gave several long groans and quit. Benny prayed that the car had enough momentum to carry it over the top of the hill and then let gravity take over. He knew that the bridge was constantly monitored, and that a tow-truck would be dispatched as soon as his stalled car was spotted, but he knew also that the bill would need to be paid at once, or his car would be impounded. His prayers were, as usual, unanswered. The Impala rolled to a stop twenty feet from the summit. He considered trying to push the car over the last few feet, but knew that as soon as he released the

brake, well before he could jump out of the driver door, his heavy automobile would have rolled backwards into the car behind. Horns were honking, drivers were climbing out of their cars, smoke was now pouring from the Impala's ruined motor, and Benny gave up. He crossed in front of the dying car and leaned out over the metal railings. He looked down to the fast flowing river, hundreds of feet below, and saw his only available option. He climbed the fence.

\* \* \*

When Benny opened his eyes he hovered for a few seconds in the fuzzy space between dream and waking, unsure of anything, waiting for the world to come into focus. He shook his head to clear the dream and the world came into focus with a bang. Literally. That last one had been far too close to home. Dust drifted down from the concrete ceiling of the bunker, and he lifted his

hand to shield his eyes. Other, more distant bombs could be heard and felt as the morning barrage of the city continued. Next to him on the makeshift mattress Diane stirred and came awake. On the upturned crate which functioned as a bedside table he saw the small envelope which had arrived yesterday by military mail, informing him that young Mikey had now been taken from them. All of his boys were dead now, died fighting a senseless war which would never end. Benny got up from the blankets and limped to the far corner of the bunker, relieved to see that there was enough water for a cup of coffee, at least. Later he or Diane would have to make the terrifying trip above ground in search of provisions. Diane would probably insist on going again, as Benny's range of movement was very limited since the shrapnel had taken off half of his left foot.

Diane stirred and got up from the bed. She looked fondly at her husband. They had gone through so much together



in the years since the war had started. “You’re up early, Benny,” she said, coming up behind him to slip her arms around his waist. “Did you have bad dreams again, darling?” “Bad dreams?” Benny replied, “Not this time; quite the opposite, in fact. I dreamed of the old days, before the war, when the only things we had to worry about were dental bills and that old Chevy clunker I used to run. I dreamed of that time I got stuck at the top of the MacDonald Bridge, and the cops thought I was going to jump, and brought me home in their cruiser.”

“I’m still not convinced that you weren’t going to jump, you know,” Diane said. “I remember how upset you were about Mikey’s dental bills, and then losing your job. And wasn’t that about the time you had the emergency appendectomy? Well, I’m just glad that you came home safe that day, Benny. Think of what you’d have lost if you’d jumped! You would never have opened your own company and made all that money!”

“Yes, you’re right,” Benny said, thoughtfully. “Our troubles seem so trivial when we look back on them. Still, it was wonderful to be able to spend some time back there, back then, even in my dreams.”

Another explosion close to the shelter shook more dust and debris from the ceiling. “Yes, I wish I could have been with you, darling, if only in a dream.” Diane said. “Those were good days, with the family all around us. Good days.”

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*‘Good’ and ‘Bad’ are never absolutes. ‘Good Days’ and ‘Bad Days’ are meaningless terms unless there is a yardstick against which they can be measured. Before*

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