

Fishmeal and the Mouching Monster

A Classic Words Novel

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CHAPTER THREE

The Chase Resumes

The duck and the monster walked quietly side by side. Older trees spread their branches wisely over the forest road, but the air felt dark and chill, and an insidious despondence began to grow within Fishmeal, affecting his usual confidence. What he felt was not really fear; it was apprehension.

On reaching the chase spot, the duck and the monster paused and looked at each other. Something cold and unsettling, like an unexamined certainty, crossed Grimclaw's countenance. Fishmeal pretended not to notice, but it reminded him that he was walking with a predator.

"Here we are," said Fishmeal. "I'll stand on this spot, where I was before. You take your place there where you were. Give me a ten-second head start, and off we go."

"No fair nope," Grimclaw growled, and the yellow slits in his eyes seemed to narrow. He froze,

insidious: adj. gradually harmful

apprehension: n. anxiety

and his massive shoulders grew tense, and he stared at Fishmeal in manifest mistrust.

“Oh...,” said Fishmeal, “I see. Well then, I won’t need a head start. Let’s go on my mark.”

“Gonna get ’im,” growled Grimclaw. “Eat ’im.” And his long furry ears drew back against his head in racing mode. He made a small, grinlike expression, revealing one sharp tooth.

“On your mark,” Fishmeal announced, “get set, GO!”

Off they tore, down the road, around the bend, through the stream, under the branch, into the woods, between the trunks, over the rock, past the frog, under the bird, into the weeds, through the zephyrs, and somehow back down to the leafy road, except that this time they were running toward Fishmeal’s cabin. They ran left, and they ran right, and Fishmeal dodged and wove and ducked and scooted and tried his best. Who could say how many times Grimclaw chomped just behind Fishmeal’s shoulder, or breathed *hoh huh* into his feathers, or swiped his claws past Fishmeal’s tail, or growled *mounchmounch* into his ear.

manifest: adj. obvious

This went on for, oh, a long time.

It didn't look good.

In fact, it looked the opposite of good.

Inexorable fate was approaching, and she was not amused. Grimclaw almost gripped Fishmeal in his grim claws, and made a great whooshing swipe, and peeled off a paw-ful of feathers from Fishmeal's tail—which hurt—and the feathers flew in all directions like a poof in the road.

For Fishmeal, this was too much. He screeched to a halt and whirled around. Boy, was he miffed.

“What are you DOING?” he demanded in martial tones. There was nothing tremulous in his voice now.

“Urrr!” said Grimclaw as he dug his heels into a screech, throwing billows of dust before him onto Fishmeal's feet.

“What are you doing? You think you can just grab feathers from someduck's tail? What's wrong with you?”

Grimclaw's face lost all its ferocity. He looked down. He felt abashed. He turned around and peered back down the road as though asking

inexorable: adj. inevitable, unavoidable

martial: adj. warlike

billows: n. clouds

someone else to explain. He had never meant to be impolite. Even monsters are not allowed to be impolite, and he knew it. If his mother found out....

“Look at me!” Fishmeal commanded. “This chase is well and good, but you can’t go around swiping feathers off ducks’ tails. Where are your manners?”

Grimclaw was profoundly perplexed. The protocol of this pursuit had now reached a sophistication too sublime for his comprehension. He was confounded. He felt constrained by rules on all sides, and he could see that Fishmeal was not kidding. However, following rules of decorum during a chase was not his wont. He was a carnivore, a predator—not a benefactor.

“Urr. Okay. Yup,” he said in doleful dejection. He would try.

“Okay indeed,” said Fishmeal with a quackly-sounding humpf. “Now, let’s try again, and this time please adhere to the conventions of courteous pursuit.”

And with that, off they went again, down the road, through the shadows, over the grass, across

profoundly: adv. deeply
confounded: adj. confused
wont: n. custom

sublime: adj. lofty
constrained: v. restricted
doleful: adj. mournful

the splash, between the bugs, and throughout the day. Who could say how many times Grimclaw seemed to have Fishmeal in his claws—for immediate mouncing—only to have Fishmeal squeak through tight branches, or interpose a startled deer between himself and Grimclaw, or run in circles around a turtle. The turtles hated it.

At one point they stopped for an afternoon break, and cooled their tired feet in a stream, and shared some berries that they borrowed from bushes near the bank. But only ten minutes were allotted for a break, and there was little to talk about, and Grimclaw mostly said *yup*, and before they knew it, they were running again on schedule.

It was all very frightening, and the reality of danger began to din louder and louder in Fishmeal's mind as Grimclaw gained ground on him. With Grimclaw chomping right behind his ear, Fishmeal dodged and darted and dipped and ducked, as fast as he could, in a ducky sort of way.

From the mountain pass over there, an ostentatious purple storm clamored and bumbled impatiently at the disruption of this never-ending

interpose: v. put between
ostentatious: adj. showy
clamored: v. cried out

din: n. noise

chase. Enough, he felt. He threw gray rain around and sparked a bolt and puffed out a few winds to make his impatience known. It should not take so long, the storm thought, to mounce a duck. “Mounce,” he rumbled, “and be done with it.”

And just when the plot was coming to an end, and Grimclaw was about to transform the dodging Fishmeal into a gulp, Fishmeal suddenly whirled to a third stop—if you do not include the afternoon break, which is, after all, part of all permanent schedules and therefore cannot technically be considered a stop in the plot—and put out his wing with authority.

“Urrgh!” Grimclaw exclaimed, clearly exasperated with another interruption.

“It’s five o’clock,” Fishmeal explained with official alacrity. “Time’s up. That’s it for the day. I have to get home and cook dinner. It will get dark soon.”

Grimclaw’s hitherto carnivorous glare turned into an incredulous grimace as he realized that his chase had failed. He would mounce no duck this day. He writhed in monstrous disappointment. Vivid

alacrity: n. cheerfulness

hitherto: adv. previously

grimace: n. a sharp facial expression

images of duck dinner tormented his mind.

“Thanks for a nice day. We’ll have to do this again sometime,” Fishmeal said with a jolly wink. “Good luck to you, old monster.” And off he walked. Waddled. As calmly as ever you please. With great difficulty, he forced himself not to look back.

Grimclaw watched Fishmeal waddle down the road toward the cabin, and then, defeated and deeply dejected, he turned and slunk—we should never say *slank*—into the gray shadows of the forest, his shadow-tone fur blending so well that he seemed to become invisible.

“Some monsturr I am,” he proposed, and his long ears drooped in dejection.

...defeated and deeply dejected...

The heavy *d* consonant is often associated with doom, defeat, feeling down.

dejected: adj. in low spirits