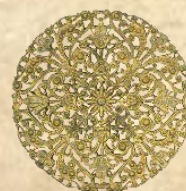


The Visitor and The Golden Orb

A contemporary tale of The Trickster's
latest picaresque adventure



The people were in peril. They were in pain. Desperation was settling in for the long haul. Land depleted. Crops failing. Fires incinerating homes and forests. Rivers flooding villages and fields. Resources growing scarce. Disease on a rampage. Gasping for breath. Eyes burning. Slowly starving.

The people had lost their way.

Some doggedly tried to solve the problems. Fought the fires. Leveed the rivers. Reseeded the land. Built new machines. Searched for cures. The outcomes never came.

The tribe sought to lay blame. They accused neighboring tribes of being the source of their circumstances. They vilified "the others". Fomented hatred of "them". *They've done this to us! They must be stopped! They must be made to pay!*

Visitors shunned. Outsiders beaten and driven out. War declared against those on the other side of the boundary line. They knew the others were suffering, too. They were experiencing the same unbearable sequence of extraction, exploitation, destruction and deprivation. Still, they must be responsible. Someone must be.

One day, a stranger arrived. He looked nothing like the members of their tribe, or any tribe. His clothes were kaleidoscopic in pattern and color. His red hair danced like flames in the wind. He stood just five feet tall. Most strange of all, he rolled into the village on a large, shining, golden orb, like a performing bear in a circus. Seemingly without effort, he moved his feet back and forth, left and right, turning on a dime, changing speed at will.

In another time, the visitor's appearance and mode of transport would have been the source of amazement and curiosity. But as things stood, the only possible reaction was fear and panic. Immediately upon his arrival, the stranger was set upon by the men, women and children in the village.

The mob chased the stranger from one end of the village to the other, through the fields, across the river, up and down the hills. The stranger always stayed just out of reach as he deftly rolled the ball this way and that, bouncing and spinning acrobatically. He eluded the grasp of even the swiftest, all the while emitting an eerie laugh that sounded part raven, part coyote, part bobcat.

Without realizing, the feverish pursuers crossed the borders from one tribe to the next. Seeing what was happening, members from other tribes were swept up in the frenzy to capture the stranger. Soon, all the tribes from all the villages had joined the chase.

It was then the stranger suddenly stopped. He stood motionless on the ball without so much as a twitch to keep his balance.

As the frustrated and angry throng surrounded him, he spoke for the first time:

"Well, you people certainly have a strange way of welcoming visitors," he said mockingly. "Here I am come with a gift for all of you and what do I get for my trouble? A mob that tries to catch me and tear me limb from limb." He jumped down from the ball. "Well, if that is what you want to do, then have at me."

The mob descended. They ripped his clothing. Tore at his flesh. Pulled his limbs from his body and used them as clubs to batter his torso. The visitor's blood sprayed like a mist across the people and the land.

Someone kicked his severed head and sent it rolling down the path. Before it disappeared over the knoll, they heard the stranger's voice say, "There it is. There is my gift." With a final unworldly laugh, he said, "Keep your eye on the ball!"

Certain that the orb must be made of solid gold or contain precious gems, the people from the many tribes leapt to grab it for themselves. But, like a beachball tossed into a stadium crowd, the ball squirted from their hands, flew over their heads, bounced from person to person. Fights broke out, a melee ensued. Still, no one could capture it. By the time the dust had settled, every person from every village had collapsed with exhaustion.

Then someone said, "Where did it go?" They looked around. The ball was gone.

Realizing they'd lost the precious gift and that it would take an all-hands effort to find it, they put aside their differences and strategized. They organized search parties. They set up a communication system. They coordinated information. They assigned tasks. They took shifts. They collaborated.

The people never found the ball. They found something else.

Working together, sharing resources, they learned how they might solve problems for the long term. Gradually, they reversed the damage done to the environment and each other. They learned together, grew together. They responded. They shared. They cared. They harnessed their new source of energy, discovering in the process how to live *with* their world, not just in it and on it.

They came to see themselves, to see others and to see their world in a new way.

As a symbol of their newfound sense of interrelationship and interdependency, the people erected a monument in the center of the village they now shared. Five meters in diameter, the sphere gleamed golden in the sun, reflecting the landscape and the faces of everyone who gazed upon it.

It was said that if you stared at it long enough, hard enough, you could hear the echo of a laughing voice saying, "Keep your eye on the ball."

THE END