

# Circular Storytelling

An international creative writing project

Three Engineering students from TU Delft and three French students from Université Lumière Lyon 2, Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3 and Université Paris 8 explore the world from the animal perspective while becoming first-time authors. An exercise in storytelling, creativity and empathy. Here are their stories.

Creative Writing Workshop held during the **International Forum on the Novel** (Lyon) by Matthew Neill Null, author of *Honey from the Lion* (Lookout, 2015) and *Allegheny Front* (Sarabande, 2016)

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The Bright Screen  
by Lilian Matricon (Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3, Law School)

Finally, their eyes met. Not for a long time, it was more of a glimpse really. From the corner of their eyes, they glanced at each other. And for a moment everything went quiet. Oddly peaceful. It didn't last longer than a second or two, but it seemed lifetime may have been suspended. Yet, they couldn't keep staring at each other.

Soon enough, this moment faded and the race was back on. The barking didn't seem to ever ease. He hadn't seen the dogs, but felt their bloodlust in his guts. Actually, he didn't know what those beasts looked like. Their violent anger filled the air with a sort of electric tension that called for an escape. He never experienced this intuitive calling before. Life had been quite uneventful. Lonely also you could say.

The forest's branches lacerated his body. What was usually his meal was rebelling against him. His sides burnt him. But he knew he couldn't stop. He felt it viscerally. He kept running, and running again, running forever. And finally, he made it to the end of the forest. There, the grass and dirt were replaced by small, warm but rough grey rocks. The squirrel stopped for a bit, assessing the situation. The barking was lessening, but a new kind of roar hit his rear. Steadier and more powerful. As it got closer to him, he hopped back into the bushes. The whirring monster passed him so fast that he felt pushed away from his breath.

What an explosive way to begin your day, or your life for that matter. The young squirrel had been born a week before, but he had been too weak to leave the burrow he had been birthed in. So weak that his mother and siblings decided to leave him there. A few remains of past meals were sitting with him when he strengthened and went to explore this new world. But no notes, obviously. After days of sleeping, this run stretched his numb legs. It gave him the physical ability to take on the unknown but also a fair warning of the dangers it could have in store for him.

The new encounter, however, he was going to make, was of a different kind. The barking of the dogs had indeed been replaced with sharp shrilling noises. Short but numerous/sonorous. He lifted his head up only to see a magpie gazing suspiciously at him:

- Who are you? What are you doing here ?! he vigorously inquired.

- Hum... nothing... I just ran and... I...I don't know, who are you? replied the fearful little mammal.

The bird looked reassured by his trembling tone. "Well, if you're not meddling with my earthworms, I can be a friend to you". His voice was calmer and inspiring trust. He didn't really know how to behave around such a peculiar company, so our squirrel decided to keep on his journey.

The bird's reaction made him realize he was hungry, and swiftly, he climbed the closest tree in search of acorns. A quick look around, a couple of hops and he found himself four trees further savouring the nuts. His belly full, he paused and enjoyed the warmth of the afternoon's sun. Back on the ground, he wandered, exploring the forest, its streams and bushes, swarming of lives he was eager to discover.

He then arrived at a small and peaceful pond. As he was gulping down drops of water, a small mouse joined him. Glittering eyes, a snub little nose and a curved tail like he had never seen before. His heart was pumping fast, but in a much more pleasant way than during the chase. His eyes were drawn towards her and he had to restrain himself from plainly staring and potentially scare her – even if she did not seem frail at all.

- Hello mouse, I am fairly unfamiliar with those woods, is this a good place to live?

- Hey! Sure! She squealed enthusiastically. The pond offers a magnificent view, and people are nice! Some places you should avoid though!

- I am still discovering the world and you sound like you have already done your fair share of exploration. Could you help me do mine? I travelled through a very odd field of rocks this morning, is this one of those I should stay away from?

- I think you have come across one of the human's paths, their "roads" as they call it. It is definitely not the friendliest place, but not the worst either. I found a new spot the other day, it may be dangerous but I would find interesting to have your opinion of it. You in? She asked with her playful sparkly eyes.

He was indubitably. The sun set on the horizon as the two companions began their way to this mysterious place. They ran across the fields and the trees, and the night had come when they finally arrived on the top of a small hill. It was abnormally bright for this time of night. The sun had been gone for a long time now, but its shine was still brightening the field below.

There, dozens of humans were lying on the grass, by packs of 2 to 10 individuals. Their faces were all pointed in the same direction, and our two friends could only see their backs. The humans were watching a huge square sun, and loud sounds were playing. As their eyes acclimatized, they discerned faces of talking humans appearing on what looked less and less like our day star.

Our squirrel stared, dazzled. Almost hypnotized. He did not feel threatened, but he could almost hear the magpie preparing to defend himself and his worms if he too had seen this odd herd. The mouse's presence reassured him, he could tackle anything. He was not sure if they were hostile, but he had to stay on guard.

His mind wandered, and escaped his body, as he gazed into the bright screen. He felt captured, absorbed. He had forgotten his earlier ordeals, and even if he couldn't see the humans nor the mouse, he felt connected to them. As you do when you share a moment with the same intensity. Or a story.