



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Blind Doe

Horacio Quiroga

Once upon a time, there was a deer—a doe—who gave birth to twin fawns, which is quite rare among deer. Unfortunately, a wildcat ate one of them, leaving only the female fawn. The other does, who loved her dearly, would always tickle her sides affectionately.

Every morning at dawn, her mother made her recite the deer's prayer, which went like this:

I: You must first sniff the leaves well before eating them, because some are poisonous.

II: You must carefully watch the river and stay still before going down to drink, to make sure there are no alligators.

III: Every half hour, you must lift your head high and sniff the wind, to sense the scent of the tiger.

IV: When eating grass from the ground, you must always check the weeds first to see if there are snakes.

This is the young deer's special prayer. Once the little doe had learned it well, her mother allowed her to wander on her own.

One afternoon, as the little doe was exploring the forest nibbling on tender leaves, she suddenly saw, in the hollow of a rotten tree, many small balls hanging together. They were dark in color, like slate.

"What could this be?" she wondered. She felt a bit afraid, but being very curious, she gave those things a good headbutt and dashed away.

She saw that the little balls had cracked open and that drops were falling from them. Tiny golden flies with very slim waists scurried all over.

The doe approached cautiously, and the little flies didn't sting her. Gently, ever so gently, she tasted a drop with the tip of her tongue and smacked her lips with delight: those drops were honey, and delicious honey at that! The slate-colored balls were a hive of little bees that didn't sting because they had no stingers. There are bees like that, you know.

In two minutes, the little doe had licked up all the honey, and overjoyed, she ran

to tell her mother. But her mother scolded her seriously.

"Be very careful, my child," she said, "with bee nests. Honey is delicious, but it's very dangerous to take it. Never mess with nests you find."

"But they don't sting, Mama!" the little doe exclaimed happily. "Horseflies and gadflies sting; bees don't."

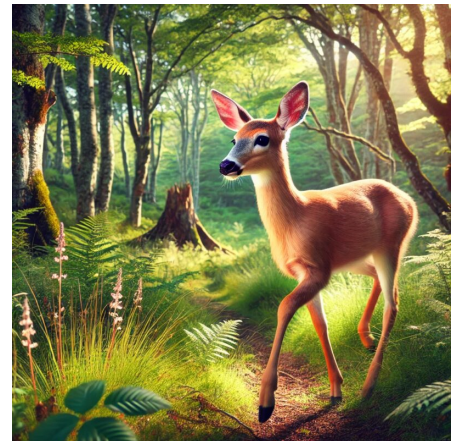
"You're mistaken, my child," her mother continued. "Today you were just lucky. There are very bad bees and wasps out there. Be careful, or you'll give me a great fright."

"Yes, Mama! Yes, Mama!" the little doe replied. But the first thing she did the next morning was to follow the paths humans had made in the forest, to find bee nests more easily.

Eventually, she found one. This time, the nest had dark bees with a little yellow band around their waists, crawling all over it. The nest looked different, but the little doe thought that since these bees were bigger, the honey must be even tastier.

She remembered her mother's warning, but she thought her mother was just exaggerating, as mothers often do. So she gave the nest a big headbutt.

Oh, how she wished she hadn't! Immediately, hundreds of wasps swarmed out, thousands of them, stinging her all over—on her head, her belly, her tail, and worst of all, in her eyes. More than ten stung her eyes.



The little doe, mad with pain, ran and ran, crying out until she suddenly had to stop: she couldn't see anymore; she was blind, completely blind.

Her eyes had swollen terribly, and she couldn't see a thing. She stood trembling with pain and fear, and could only cry out desperately, "Mama!... Mama!..."

Her mother, who had gone out to look for her because she was taking so long, finally found her and was heartbroken to see her little doe blind. She led her home step by step, with her daughter's head resting on her neck. The forest animals they passed came close to look sadly at the poor little doe's eyes.

The mother didn't know what to do. What remedies could she possibly make? She knew that in the village on the other side of the forest lived a man who had medicines. He was a hunter and did hunt deer, but he was a good man.

Despite her fear, the desperate mother decided to take her daughter to him. But

first, she wanted to get a letter of recommendation from the Anteater, who was a good friend of the man.

So she set off, after leaving the little doe well hidden, and ran through the forest, where a tiger almost caught her. When she reached her friend's home, she was exhausted.

This friend was, as we've said, an anteater—but of a small kind with yellow fur and a sort of black vest held by two straps over the shoulders. They have prehensile tails because they live mostly in trees and hang from them.

No one in the forest knew why the anteater and the hunter were such close friends, but perhaps one day we'll find out.

The poor mother reached the anteater's den.

"Knock! Knock! Knock!" she called, panting.

"Who is it?" answered the anteater.

"It's me, the doe!"

"Oh, hello! What brings you here?"

"I've come to ask you for a letter of recommendation for the hunter. My little doe, my daughter, is blind."

"Ah, the little doe?" replied the anteater. "She's a good soul. If it's for her, I'll give you what you need. But you don't need anything written... Show him this, and he'll help you."

With the tip of his tail, the anteater handed the doe a dried snake's head, which still had its venomous fangs.

"Show him this," the anteater said. "That's all you need."

"Thank you, Anteater!" the doe replied gratefully. "You're a good friend."

And off she went, running, because it was very late and dawn was approaching.

On her way back, she picked up her daughter, who was still whimpering, and together they finally reached the village. They walked very slowly and stayed close to the walls to avoid being noticed by dogs.

They arrived at the hunter's door.

"Knock! Knock! Knock!" they tapped.

"Who's there?" came a man's voice from inside.

"We're the does!... WE HAVE THE SNAKE'S HEAD!"

The mother quickly mentioned this so the man would know they were friends of the anteater.

"Oh, I see!" said the man, opening the door. "What's the matter?"

"We've come for you to heal my daughter, the little doe, who is blind."

She told the hunter the whole story about the bees.

"Hmm!... Let's see what's wrong with this young lady," said the hunter. He went back inside and returned with a high chair, helping the little doe sit so he could examine her eyes without bending too much. He looked closely at her eyes with a big round magnifying glass, while the mother lit the scene with a lantern hanging from her neck.

"This isn't too serious," the hunter said at last, helping the little doe down. "But you'll need a lot of patience. Apply this ointment to her eyes every night, and keep her in the dark for twenty days. Then, have her wear these yellow glasses, and she'll be cured."

"Thank you so much, Hunter!" the mother replied, very happy and grateful. "How much do I owe you?"

"It's nothing," the hunter said with a smile. "But be very careful of the dogs, because a man down the street has dogs trained to track deer."

The does were very scared; they walked on tiptoes and stopped every few steps. Even so, the dogs caught their scent and chased them for miles into the forest. They ran along a wide path, with the little doe bleating ahead.

Just as the hunter had said, the cure worked. But only the mother knew how hard it was to keep the little doe inside the hollow of a big tree for twenty endless days. It was pitch dark inside. Finally, one morning, the mother moved aside the big pile of branches she'd stacked at the tree's entrance to block out the light. The little doe, wearing her yellow glasses, came out running and shouting:

"I can see, Mama! I can see everything now!"

And the doe, resting her head on a branch, wept with joy at seeing her little one cured.

She was completely healed. But even though she was healthy and happy, the little doe had a secret that made her a bit sad. She wanted more than anything to repay the man who had been so kind to her, but she didn't know how.

Until one day, she thought she'd found a way. She started exploring the edges of lagoons and marshes, collecting heron feathers to bring to the hunter. The hunter, for his part, occasionally thought about the little blind doe he had cured.

One rainy night, the man was reading in his room, pleased because he had just fixed the thatched roof, which no longer leaked. He was reading when he heard a knock. He opened the door and saw the little doe, who had brought him a small bundle—a little plume of heron feathers, all wet.

The hunter began to laugh, and the little doe, feeling ashamed because she thought he was laughing at her humble gift, left very sadly. Determined, she searched for bigger feathers, clean and dry, and a week later, she returned with them. This time, the man, who had laughed affectionately before, didn't laugh because he realized the little doe hadn't understood his laughter. Instead, he gave her a bamboo tube full of honey, which she accepted with immense joy.

From then on, the little doe and the hunter became great friends. She insisted on bringing him heron feathers, which are very valuable, and she would spend hours chatting with him. He always set an enamel jug full of honey on the table and pulled up the high chair for his friend. They spent their time like this, watching the flames in the wood stove, while outside, the wind and rain battered the thatched roof of the cottage.

Out of fear of the dogs, the little doe only visited on stormy nights. And when evening fell and it began to rain, the hunter would place the little jug of honey and a napkin on the table. Then he would sip his coffee and read, waiting by the door for the familiar Knock! Knock! of his friend, the little doe.

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