

Day Ten

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On the eighth day of cre - a - tion - no, it was - n't yet quite done -



There were stars far in the he - avens and a clo - ser, yel - low sun.



There were rocks and rills and ri - vers. There were iths - mu - ses and isles.



There were pebb - les and pen - in - su - las and da - les and de - files.



There was rice and rho - do - den - dron. There was wood - ruff, woad, and wheat.



There was fox - glove and for - get - me - not and moss and mar - gue - rite.



There were hawks and hares and hedge - hogs. There were spi - ders, squid, and snails.



There were trout and toads and tur - tles. There were wom - bats, worms, and whales.

Complete lyrics begin on the next page

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Day Ten

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On the eighth day of creation – no, it wasn't yet quite done –
There were stars far in the heavens and a closer, yellow sun.
There were rocks and rills and rivers. There were isthmuses and isles.
There were pebbles and peninsulas and dales and defiles.
There was rice and rhododendron. There was woodruff, woad, and wheat.
There was foxglove and forget-me-not and moss and marguerite.
There were hawks and hares and hedgehogs. There were spiders, squid, and snails.
There were trout and toads and turtles. There were wombats, worms, and whales.

As he watched the creatures multiply, according to command,
God computed a projection from the data close at hand.
There would not be simple, exponential growth procreation,
For some numbers would be lost to mishaps, famine, or predation,
All at rates depending on how common other creatures were,
With a final equilibrium unlikely to occur
Without one more twist of plot for getting actors off the stage:
For the good of all creation, some must perish of old age.

That seemed like the right size project for completing on day nine.
God directed all the creatures to assemble in a line.
As each beast or bird passed by the desk where God sat with his slate,
He thought hard about its lifestyle, and he granted it a fate:
For *Drosophila melanogaster*, found on rotting plums,
It's at most three months from hatching until death from old age comes;
While for *Chelonoidis nigra*, a black tortoise on the shore
Of Galapagos, the span is fifteen decades, sometimes more.

As day nine was dragging onward, God was feeling rather tired.
He'd forgotten the diversity the biosphere required,
So he thought he'd take a shortcut, just before the sun would set,
And assign an equal span to every life not processed yet.
There were but four creatures waiting: one held upright by his spine,
One who seemed a distant cousin and was swinging from a vine,
One who barked with great excitement, one with long and upright ears.
Dog and donkey, man and monkey: each was granted thirty years.

On day ten, an edge of dawn was coming to the sky of black
When God noticed from his window that all four had just come back.
He'd anticipated something like this. He'd prepared a speech.
"I have no more years to offer. I have done my best for each.
All creation is in balance with the sun and rain and snow,
And I've made a lovely garden where the knowledge tree can grow,
So be gone!" Thus God concluded, clearly showing signs of stress,
When the donkey said, "I'm not requesting more time. I want less.

Won't the farmer place each portion of his harvest in a sack
For transporting to the miller? That will all be on my back.
Won't the mason call upon me to transport his heavy stones?
Won't I carry wounded soldiers? Those will all rest on my bones.
Thirty years of such a burden is much more than I can bear.
When I've laboured for far fewer, will I not have done my share?"
God considered and decided, though he'd once planned to be firm,
And he struck off eighteen years of labour from the donkey's term.

Then the dog appeared before him. "When my master is asleep,
I will guard my master's household. I will herd my master's sheep.
I will entertain his children. I will fetch the fowl he shoots.
I will guide the blind pedestrian through unfamiliar routes.
When my voice is lost through barking, when my teeth no longer bite,
Will my master still protect me through the cold and hungry night?
Let me live but when I'm useful. Let me die just past my prime."
God approved the dog's petition and took twelve years from his time.

Then God called to him the monkey. "You've no burden as your role.
Surely thirty years is not too long for such a cheerful soul."
And the monkey said, "It may appear I'll live a life of ease.
Still, my race will end its time in zoos, in exile from the trees.
When I've capered to amuse a child for nearly half an hour,
And I'm tossed an apple as reward, it's going to be sour.
My wide grin conceals a sadness. I want fewer years, not more."
God reduced the monkey's life ten years and left him but a score.

Finally, man stood in God's presence and began to make his case.
"Thirty years will not be long enough for such a noble race!
When I've built a fine, stone hearth from which the wood smoke rises high,
And my trees are bearing fruit, it will be much too soon to die."
"You can have the donkey's eighteen years", said God. "That's forty-eight."
"That is not enough," said man, "for all the cities I'd create."
"Take the dog's twelve also, then," said God. "Let sixty be your span."
"Only sixty?" God, disgusted, gave the monkey's ten to man.

So, it's three score years and ten man lived, when Adam walked the land,
And the thirty that he started with, originally planned,
Would be spent in health and humour. Eighteen donkey years came next,
When with labouring for others he would find his seasons vexed.
Then for twelve he'd growl and grumble, just a dog who'd lost his bite,
Grateful for a quiet corner by the fire to pass the night.
He would finally have his monkey years, ten years of weary days,
Seeing children laugh and point at him for all his foolish ways.

This is an adaptation of "Three Score and Ten", a tale from the Grimm Brothers' collection (KHM 176). I read it in translation, in Ralph Mannheim's book "Grimms' Tales for Young and Old: The Complete Stories", Anchor, 1983.