



Lineage

Will Bontrager

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I never learned how to sew clothes. Nor how to plough a field.

Not that I was unable to learn. But to learn would impinge upon the occupation of someone else.

You see, my family, my whole lineage, has been the ruler of the lands since ancient times.

I was slated to be the next Judgment Chair. Both the chair and the person sitting in the chair had the same name, "Judgment Chair". It was as if the two were inseparable, which was the truth while official duties were performed. The Judgment Chair sat in the Judgment Chair to dispense permissions and judge disputes.

While I was growing up, Mom provided my education. She would frequently segue from the day's agenda by informing me, "There are the served and there are the servers."

Then, she would get in a serious mode, more serious than her normal serious outlook on life.

"On the surface, my daughter Swirl, it appears that we, you and me and all who came before us, are the served," she would continue. "But when you think it through, you will find a different way to look at it."

Mom would peer at my face like she was trying to look into my head to see what was there. As she was about ready to resume my education, her face betrayed an uncertainty about what I did and did not understand.

"If it was not for us," Mom continued the segue, "the people would not have the rewarding livelihoods they have. They would have nobody to let them know they were needed. They would have to govern themselves and they would not know how."

At that moment, Mom would put a hand on my shoulder and deliver the whole point.

"When you sit in the Judgment Chair, you must remember, always, that we are here to serve the people. That has always been the role of our entire lineage."

I was young and the future seemed far away. Still, Mom's teaching seeped into my consciousness. As you will see. That is the entire point of this story.

One of the things I thoroughly enjoyed as a youngster was to pretend to be a child of parents who maintained the household. It didn't matter that my parents were not household. Everybody just assumed I belonged there because I was there.

One day, a little boy intentionally pushed a little girl so she fell on the rocky floor. She cried. He kicked her.

Her crime? She had smiled at the boy and, as a gesture of friendship, had pointed out that part of his sassafras had stuck to his shirt. She was giving him a chance to remove the evidence before someone else noticed it.

The boy was sensitive to being caught with the forbidden sassafras. He leaned over the prone and crying girl and hissed at her, "Tell anyone and I will hit your head until you are dead."

He was so intent on punishing his well-wisher that he did not notice me. I was good at not being noticed and smoothly glided away from the scene.

Only partly away, though, for the boy's mother came scampering over. I sat down behind a water vessel, but I could still hear.

"Little Flory, you will never, ever, in your entire life mention what happened here," she ordered the poor girl. "Gatta, you come with me. I will get you another sassafras."

I was not grown up yet and not considered old enough to dispense judgment. Anybody who would have known what I witnessed would have expected me to report the incident to my mom.

But I did not. I would have had to admit that I was mingling among the household people's children. It would be frowned on, even though I would have explained I did it so I would be better able to dispense judgment.

Instead of reporting it, I followed Gatta's mother and her son. As soon as Gatta scampered off with his sassafras, Gatta's mom went into the pantry. She intended to take inventory.

I followed and made a noise so I would be noticed.

"Hello Swirl, what are you doing in the household area? Can I do something for you?"

"Yes, Gatta's Mom.

"You can steal 3 sticks of sassafras and you can invite both Gatta and Flory to a private space. You will tell the children that Swirl gave permission to enjoy the 3 sassafras. The 3 of you will savor the sassafras while you explain why children must get along together.

"You will describe why it is disheartening to see children fighting. You will also explain that it is very wrong to steal because when someone expects something to be there and it is not, it can be hurtful.

"If it stops from happening anymore after that, I will not tell Mom how the sassafras has been disappearing during the last year."

Gatta's Mom gaped at me. She seemed incapable of responding.

"If you forget anything I said, you may come to me and I will be happy to say it again."

Then I walked out of the pantry.

Gatta and Flory became friends. No more sassafras disappeared. It gave me confidence.

That was then.

This is today.

Today, as I sat in the Judgment Chair, Gatta and Flory stood in front of me and asked permission to marry. I remembered the childhood incident and smiled at the audacity of the little girl that was me.

"You have the chair's permission to marry each other."

The two broke into smiles, turned to each other, and hugged.

I continued. "The Judgment Chair has a special request."

The blissful couple stopped looking into each other's eyes and paid attention.

"The Judgment Chair's special request is entirely voluntary.

"It would please the chair if you would ask Gatta's Mom for 4 sticks of sassafras. Then, invite Gatta's Mom and Flory's Mom to a pleasant place where the 4 of you can enjoy the sassafras in quiet comradery.

"Thank you for considering the special request."

Gatta and Flory looked somewhat confused. As did Flory's Mom. But Gatta's Mom was beaming the biggest smile her face was capable of handling.

The animated facial expressions of Gatta's Mom told me that she remembered the sassafras incident. I am certain she realized I was thanking her for allowing the little girl back then to have the confidence she needed for growing up as a good and fair

Judgment Chair.

Silently, I thanked Mom for repeating, over and over again, that there are both the served and the servers. And her insistence that the roles may not be as clearly defined as one might think.

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Books by **Will Bontrager** and his pen name, **Vern Harrison**.



By **Will Bontrager** (WillBontrager.com):

Novels and Amish-recipe chocolate candy cookbooks. The website also has short stories, Amish recipes, poems, and fun stuff for writers.

By **Vern Harrison** (VernHarrison.com):

Vern Harrison writes Western novels. If you enjoy Westerns, I am certain you will enjoy the *Pursuit*. trilogy. A fourth novel, an offshoot of *Pursuit*., is being written.

