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LARRY THE ANGRY TURTLE

By Phillip W. Weiss

CHAPTER ONE

A beach can be a dangerous place, especially for a baby turtle. Lurking on the beach are many creatures for which baby turtles are a scrumptious delicacy. There are the hordes of crabs that attack these frail little newborns without mercy, killing and eating them by the score. But even more terrifying are the seagulls that patrol the sky, ever searching for a tasty innocent toddler to devour. These rapacious carnivores swoop down from the sky and pounce on the tiny helpless creatures without warning. For these hapless babes, alone and defenseless against powerful pincers and sharp beaks, the chance for survival is practically zero.

But one baby turtle was determined to survive. That turtle's name was Larry. Larry was a loggerhead turtle. He was the last of a clutch of one-hundred eggs that his mother, Gertrude, had deposited in a nest she had dug on a stretch of beach located on the eastern shore of Florida.

Gertrude intuitively knew that the baby turtle developing inside that one-hundredth egg would be destined for greatness and named the unborn baby Larry, which in turtle language means "special one" or "great one."

After laying her eggs, Gertrude carefully covered the nest with sand, bid her gestating brood a fond farewell, and then dragged herself back to the ocean, never to return.

When he hatched, Larry was about four inches long and had a beautiful soft shell. Within minutes after hatching, he had tunneled his way to the surface of the sand. Upon reaching the surface, he saw that he was

not alone. With him were all of his brothers and sisters, who, like him, were all newly hatched. Each knew instinctively that in order to survive they would have to make the trek across the beach to the ocean where they would be safe. Nobody knew this better or felt this feeling more strongly than Larry.

Although small and vulnerable, Larry was determined to live. Boldly thrusting his legs deep into the sand, he began his journey to the ocean. With each step, he implored his brothers and sisters to make haste.

“Let’s go! Move quickly!” he cried. “If we don’t make it to the ocean we will die!”

Undaunted by the dangers on the beach, Larry placed himself at the front of the group and led the march to the sea. Immediately after taking the lead he was attacked by a crab, but the crab was small and inexperienced in the ways of killing, and Larry was able to fend off the marauder with little difficulty. But dealing with the seagulls proved to be a far more challenging task. From every direction these dangerous birds swooped down, picking off Larry’s brothers and sisters one by one. Larry himself almost succumbed, but he was able to evade attack by crawling under a piece of wood imbedded in the sand. From that vantage point, Larry could see his brothers and sisters being slaughtered as they attempted to reach the ocean.

What Larry saw filled him with rage. And he swore that one day he would take revenge on those creatures that have caused his kind so much

misery and death.

“Why should turtles be treated so horribly?” Larry asked himself.

“We have a right to live too,” he thought with great conviction.

Finally the carnage stopped. No more baby turtles could be found. The seagulls circled the beach one more time looking for any stragglers, and finding none, flew away. After the birds were gone, Larry crawled out from his hiding place and continued his march to the ocean. When he was about forty feet away from the shoreline, he came across the carcass of one of the baby turtles whose half-eaten body was now rotting in the sand. This gruesome sight made Larry’s blood boil with anger and it reinforced his determination to make the beach safe for his kind.

Suddenly Larry saw a crab charging straight toward him. The crab was big and powerful. Larry had no time to hide and so had to fight. The crab grabbed Larry in one of its pincers and started pulling Larry toward its gaping mouth. But Larry fought back. With a strength that surprised the crab, Larry broke free from the crab’s hold and then bit the crab on the top of its head, causing the crab to retreat in confusion and pain. A baby turtle actually fighting back was unprecedented. The other crabs on the beach took notice of this amazing event and Larry was bothered no more.

Finally Larry reached the ocean. He was alone. All of his brothers and sisters were dead. By now his anger was boundless. But as soon as he entered the water he felt immediate pleasure and relief. He no longer had to crawl; he could now swim. He soon came to know and admire the

myriad of creatures that inhabit the ocean. There were fish in all shapes and sizes, and they all seemed to be very friendly. There were also huge clumps of seaweed where Larry, who was by nature a vegetarian, could eat kelp and sleep undisturbed at night. Living in this secure environment helped to ease Larry's anguish.

Larry thoroughly enjoyed his life in the ocean. For him it was bliss. As the years passed, Larry grew to be big and strong. When he reached full maturity, Larry was an impressive sight to behold. He was over five feet long and weighed almost five hundred pounds. He was a handsome turtle, with a large, majestic head and a beautiful shell that displayed a kaleidoscopic array of colors. He was the envy of the sea.

Over the years Larry made many friends. His best friends were Solly the stingray, with his long pointed tail; Bobby the porpoise, with his perennial smile; and Calvin the squid, with his big eyes and long legs. All day long they frolicked in the waves and laughed, led by Larry who organized all the fun.

But despite his good life, Larry lacked peace of mind, for he never forgot his vow. One day, while playing with Calvin, Larry suddenly turned away and started swimming west. Calvin, greatly surprised, quickly swam over to Larry and asked, "Why have you stopped playing?" Larry stopped swimming and told Calvin that he had to return to the place of his birth.

"But why?" Calvin asked. "Everything you need is here," he implored.

Larry said, "I know, but I must keep my vow."

"What vow?" Calvin asked, perplexed.

"It's something you won't understand," Larry said.

"I thought we were friends," Calvin said, now feeling hurt.

"You're my closest friend, Calvin," Larry said. "But I must leave now."

"I'll miss you," Calvin said and started crying.

Larry said, "I'll miss you too, but I'll be back some day, I promise."

Calvin continued to cry as Larry swam away.

CHAPTER TWO

Despite his anger, Larry had a friendly, easy-going disposition. While growing up he never hurt anyone and always was helpful to others. But while swimming back to the place of his birth, Larry's personality changed. He felt the anger, which had been long suppressed and almost forgotten, welling up inside him, and this anger grew stronger and stronger with each passing day. This anger in turn fed the obsession that impelled Larry to swim on and on, completely indifferent to his surroundings.

After swimming continuously for five weeks, Larry saw in the distance the stretch of beach where he was born, and almost died, so many years before. During his journey, Larry had not eaten. Yet he did not feel hungry. What he did feel, instead, was an unshakeable belief that he

had something important to accomplish, something that had to be done, even if it meant his death.

As Larry approached the beach, he was embarking on something that no male loggerhead turtle had ever done before. For the first time in the history of his specie, a male loggerhead turtle was returning to the place of his birth. Heretofore, only females had returned to the beaches to lay their eggs. The males had no business being on the beach. Their place was in the ocean, or so that was the case up until now. But Larry had no interest in being a showoff. He had more serious concerns, and if anybody had told him that what he was about to do was unprecedented, it would not have mattered to him in the least. All Larry knew was that he had something important to accomplish.

CHAPTER THREE

It was night when Larry swam onto the beach. The beach was deserted. But that did not cause Larry any worry. Instead of feeling loneliness or fear, he felt strangely invigorated and bold. And instead of feeling sluggish from the weight of his massive shell, he felt almost as light as a feather. With little effort, Larry walked across the beach, found a comfortable looking sand dune covered with grass, dug a hole in the sand, and soon fell asleep.

Larry awoke with the dawn. He felt refreshed and ready to meet the

day. He also had a craving for food and a desire to explore.

The beach was littered with refuse left by the people who use the beach during the day. Wherever Larry went he saw empty soda bottles, paper bags, and cigarette butts. Larry was depressed by the condition of the beach and was doubly convinced that returning to the place of his birth was the right thing to do. Now he had a score to settle, not only with the creatures who had killed his brothers and sisters, but also with the humans who had turned his birthplace into a garbage dump.

“The world must learn to respect the turtle,” Larry thought to himself.

Then he saw something a couple of hundred feet away that immediately caught his attention. Two seagulls were fighting over the remains of a baby loggerhead turtle. Carefully concealing himself in the sand, Larry slowly approached the birds. The birds did not know that they were being watched, and continued to shriek with delight as they fought over the turtle’s remains. To them, devouring a baby turtle was as natural as breathing or flying. After all, they were the masters of the beach, so they thought, and nobody could tell them what to do, and it would be foolhardy for anyone to challenge them, especially a turtle, who, if he valued his life, would think twice before trying to confront a group of seagulls.

“Oh what a scrumptious turtle,” one seagull crowed to the other, a morsel of turtle meat hanging from his beak.

“It sure was,” the other happily agreed. “I can’t wait to find some more.”

It would have never occurred to them that the turtles had feelings too, and they would have laughed out loud at the very thought of it.

As they continued to cackle with delight, little did they suspect, nor could they possibly know, that soon their world was going to change.

CHAPTER FOUR

Larry sneaked closer and closer to the seagulls, who continued to enjoy their feast. Suddenly, with a burst of energy, Larry, using his powerful flippers like springs, jumped out of the sand and ran straight toward the birds.

The seagulls were shocked. They never saw a turtle behave this way before. Larry shouted to them, “Leave that turtle alone!” and continued to charge at the birds, who had now taken to flight.

Flying above Larry, the seagulls asked, “Why are you angry at us?”

“Because you birds are nothing but murderers,” Larry said, looking up at the circling seagulls. “I was born here, and as a baby turtle I saw what you birds did to my brothers and sisters and now I’m back to seek my revenge.”

“But it wasn’t us,” the seagulls complained. “We want to be your friends,” they insisted.

Larry was not moved by their offer. Instead, a feeling of hatred welled up from deep inside him, and Larry looked up at the birds and said, "We can never be friends as long as you continue killing little turtles."

"But we've got to eat," the birds lamented, "and if you stop us we will die."

"That is not my concern," Larry retorted. "I will protect the beach from bad birds like you. Now go away!"

The birds continued to fly above Larry. Finally, one of the seagulls said, "What you're doing is wrong. This is the way things are and it has always been this way. We're sorry about what happened to you when you were a baby, but we were not even alive at the time."

"So what? That matters nothing to me," Larry said angrily. "You are the descendants of those who hurt my family, and so you must pay the price for what your ancestors did. So be off with you now and tell all your friends not to return."

Angry and bewildered, the seagulls flew away. Larry turned to the half-eaten remains of the baby turtle. He buried the remains of the turtle deep in the sand and then resumed his exploration of the beach, determined to protect any turtle in distress.

CHAPTER FIVE

It was still early in the morning. People had not yet appeared on the

beach. Larry walked along the shore and then returned to the sand dunes. While crossing the beach, he saw the mangled remains of baby turtles who had failed to reach the safety of the ocean.

“There must be other nests around here,” Larry thought to himself.

After walking about a quarter of a mile, Larry came across a mound of sand that appeared to be moving. Larry watched with great excitement as baby turtles suddenly began emerging from the mound. It was a glorious sight to behold and Larry was beside himself with joy.

“Hello,” Larry said to each little cousin as they poked their heads through the sand.

“Hi!” each little turtle replied. “Who are you?”

“I’m Larry and I’m going to make sure that you make it to the ocean safe and sound.”

“Why do we need your help?” they asked.

“Because there’s danger on this beach,” Larry explained.

“On this beautiful beach?” the baby turtles replied incredulously.

“That’s right,” Larry said. “And soon you will understand what I’m talking about.”

Larry could see in the distance a huge flock of seagulls flying toward the nest. Leading these birds were the two seagulls that Larry had drove away before. When the seagulls were directly over the nest, one of the leaders shouted to Larry, “Now we’ll teach you a lesson, you big, ugly log!”

Larry shouted back, “If you so much as even touch one of these

turtles, I will crush you in my flippers!”

But the seagulls were not deterred. They continued to fly high above the turtles’ heads, preparing to attack. Finally they started to dive.

“Here they come!” Larry called to his baby cousins. “I’ll protect you!”

The seagulls swooped down, screeching, “You’ll not chase us away!”, and attacked with blinding speed, causing panic among the terrified baby turtles who frantically scurried about trying to avoid the angry birds’ beaks. But Larry, moving like a whirlwind, repeatedly drove the attackers away.

Everytime a turtle was attacked, Larry shouted, “Put that turtle down!” and charged straight at the offending birds.

“No!” the seagulls shouted back. “The beach is ours, not yours, and we’re hungry!” they cackled defiantly.

“The beach belongs to the turtles too!” Larry retorted, “and I’m here to make sure that my little cousins survive.”

The seagulls screamed back, “You can’t stop us, you stupid oaf!”

“I will,” Larry said.

Then the unimaginable occurred. Larry grabbed one of the seagulls with his flippers and began squeezing the bird with all of his might. Then Larry began devouring the bird. The seagulls, appalled and stunned, stopped what they were doing and gasped in horror. The sight of one of their kind being killed and eaten by a turtle filled them with revulsion and

despair.

“Look what you’ve done!” the seagulls screeched at Larry.

“I warned you what would happen, but you didn’t believe me,” Larry said, with no trace of remorse.

“You’ll pay for this!” the seagull leader said.

“You made me do it!” Larry said in reply, not for a moment backing down. Larry then swallowed the dead seagull with one final gulp.

The seagulls stopped their attack and flew away, high into the sky. Through his bold efforts, Larry had saved all of his little cousins from death.

When the seagulls were gone, Larry said to the baby turtles, “Now is your chance to reach the ocean. Follow me!” With Larry in the lead, the group resumed their march to the ocean.

Having seen what had happened to the seagull, the crabs at first did not attack. But as the turtles crawled by, some of the crabs, believing that they could evade Larry, darted out from their burrows in the sand and began grabbing at the turtles. However, each time a crab grabbed a turtle, Larry would charge at the offending crustacean who, frightened, would relinquish its victim and then frantically bury itself in the sand to escape Larry’s wrath. Most of the crabs were able to escape without being harmed. But one crab wasn’t so lucky. Larry caught him before he could disappear into the sand, and with all the other crabs watching, ripped the unfortunate beast into pieces and then ate each piece until the entire

creature was devoured. Appalled by this grisly spectacle, the crabs, now terrified of Larry, did not bother the baby turtles anymore.

Confident that there would be no further trouble, the turtles, with Larry still in the lead, continued their trek to the ocean. But little did they know that this peaceful interlude would soon be shattered.

CHAPTER SIX

As people began arriving at the beach, they were shocked and amazed by what they saw. A large turtle, running about on its flippers, was fighting off hundreds of seagulls who were attacking the turtle from all directions. The seagulls had returned in force to settle their score with Larry. No one among the humans knew what had caused the fight nor did anyone among them care.

The fighting got steadily worse as more and more seagulls joined in the fracas. Soon the turtle was totally obliterated from view.

People from other parts of the beach came running to see what was going on and in an hour a large crowd had formed. The commotion soon attracted the attention of the police, who attempted to cordone off the area where the fighting was occurring.

Larry remained completely oblivious to all the attention he and the seagulls were attracting. All Larry knew was that he was fighting for his life, and for the survival of his little cousins who wanted desperately to get to the ocean.

“I’ll protect you,” Larry called out to his charges.

Meanwhile the seagulls continued their relentless assault on Larry, who fought the birds with all of his might.

The people on the beach did not understand the drama that was taking place. To them, the fighting involved a bunch of animals who apparently had gone berserk, tearing up a beach, and ruining an otherwise beautiful beach day.

While the police were standing around trying to figure out what to do, the fighting escalated; within minutes several hundred more seagulls had converged on Larry, trying to kill him. But the seagulls’ efforts failed, for Larry was too strong for them. The bodies of dead and injured seagulls soon littered the beach. This delighted the crabs who quickly went to work devouring the seagull remains.

Undeterred by the heavy losses they were incurring, the seagulls redoubled their efforts to destroy Larry. And Larry, undaunted, continued to fight back.

“Go away!” Larry yelled and would crush a seagull between his powerful legs.

“You go away!” the seagulls yelled back, and would continue stabbing at Larry with their beaks.

After a while, the seagulls began arguing among themselves as some of the seagulls wanted to leave while others wanted to continue fighting.

For the seagulls who wanted to continue fighting, the choice was clear – either defeat Larry or die. To them the very survival of their specie was at stake. They feared that if defeated by this turtle, they would be denied their major source of food and would starve.

But other seagulls disagreed. “Why should we fight?” they asked. “There are other sources of food, and besides, we can’t defeat this big, crazy turtle.”

Hearing this defeatist talk, some of the seagulls became crazy with rage. “Traitors! Cowards!” they cried. “We are the masters of the beach and no turtle will ever drive us away!” they said with conviction, and with those words redoubled their efforts to defeat Larry, who continued to kill them one by one.

Larry saw that the seagulls were now divided and hoped that the aggressive seagulls would listen to their pacifist brothers and stop fighting. But they would not listen, and so the battle raged on.

While the fighting ensued, the seagulls, intent on destroying Larry, completely ignored the baby turtles who continued to inch their way toward the ocean. With cries of joy, the baby turtles finally reached the water and with a powerful lunge each entered the refreshing surf.

As the baby turtles disappeared into the water, the seagulls gradually broke off their attack. Even the most fanatical seagulls realized that further fighting was useless. Larry was victorious; his revenge complete. The seagulls’ domination of the beach had finally been broken.

Seeing that the fighting had stopped, the police left the beach. But Larry was soon to discover that his struggles were not yet over.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Although to the turtles Larry was a hero, to the people on the beach he was a threat. Nobody knew what to do with this big, aggressive turtle and not understanding him, they feared him instead.

Now Larry was not too fond of people either. He saw how they fouled the beach with their garbage and trampled on the turtles' nests, killing hundreds of baby turtles. Larry wanted to put a stop to that at once.

Larry noticed a man, a woman, and two young children sitting on a blanket that, unbeknownst to them, they had placed right on top of a turtle's nest. Infuriated, Larry charged straight toward the family. Seeing this huge reptile coming straight at them, the children became hysterical while the man and woman threw their beach chairs at the charging turtle in an effort to defend themselves and their children.

"Get out of here!" the man shouted, as he flung a chair at the intimidating intruder.

"Go away!" the woman screamed, as she tossed a chair directly in the path of the oncoming beast.

The man and woman frantically continued hurling objects at Larry until finally a thermos bottle struck him on the top of his head, momentarily dazing him. While Larry was staggering, the man and woman gathered up

their children and quickly left the area. Moments later Larry recovered and started chasing other people away from their blankets and chairs, and soon the waterfront was in a state of pandemonium, as this maniacal turtle rampaged up and down the beach, completely demolishing scores of chairs, beach umbrellas, blankets and towels.

Again the police appeared, this time to quell the disturbance caused by this troublesome turtle. But the police were in a quandary. Under the law, the loggerhead turtle was a protected specie, so the police had to make every reasonable effort to capture Larry without harming or killing him. But Larry proved to be one tough turtle. First the police threw a net over him, but Larry bit right through the cords. Then they tried to put a noose around his head, but Larry just shook the noose loose. Then they tried to shoot him with a tranquilizer shot from a rifle, but the needle bent. Now desperate, the police decided to call for help. Soon an army helicopter was hovering over the scene. Hanging from the helicopter was a large steel cage. After several attempts, the helicopter succeeded in placing the cage over Larry. Upon seeing this, the police shouted for joy and were preparing to transfer their prisoner to the local zoo authorities when something truly astonishing occurred. Using his large, powerful front flippers, Larry started digging a tunnel and a few minutes later he was standing outside of the cage. The police, now totally frustrated, had to again confront this most formidable adversary.

“What can we do with this crazy turtle?” they asked each other with

despair. “Let’s shoot it!” one irate officer demanded. “It’s only a turtle,” other officers said. The large crowd of onlookers agreed with the police. “Kill it! Get rid of it!” many yelled.

The officer-in-charge listened to these comments and after giving the matter some thought, reluctantly gave the order to kill the turtle, justifying the decision on the grounds that the turtle posed a threat to the public safety and would eventually hurt or kill someone if not put down. As the police prepared to carry out this order, it seemed that Larry had just a few more moments to live.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Larry watched intently as the police slowly approached him, guns drawn. He sensed that something bad was going to happen, but he made no effort to flee or defend himself.

“What are these people doing and why are they holding those metal objects in their hands?” Larry asked himself. “Don’t they know that I am now master of the beach and protector of the turtles?”

Of course, the police could not know what Larry was thinking, and if they had been told, they would not have believed it and would have called anyone who did believe it crazy. The possibility that animals could actually think like human beings was an idea that most people found preposterous. True, many people had pets, such as dogs and cats and birds, and even turtles, and lavished them with love and attention. But to believe that their

pets were capable of abstract thought was something that almost no person was willing to accept. Because if that were the case, then the relationship between humans and animals would have to be redefined since the inferiority of animals could no longer be taken for granted.

On the beach, however, no one was troubled by such thoughts. To the police, Larry was nothing but a dumb reptile whose behavior posed a threat to the safety of the public. And for that he was going to pay with his life.

CHAPTER NINE

Ten police officers formed a circle around Larry, each officer holding a gun aimed straight at Larry's head. They were waiting for the order to open fire. Suddenly an old man ran out from the crowd and started pleading with the police not to shoot.

"Don't shoot!" the old man said. "I can talk to this poor creature!" he insisted.

Hearing that, everyone started laughing. The old man, whose name was Cliff, was known as the town crackpot. He was often observed wandering aimlessly and talking to himself. But he was considered harmless, so people indulged him in his fantasies and left him alone.

Cliff, however, persisted. "Please, I beg of you, let me talk to him," he pleaded over and over again.

Soon the old man was weeping inconsolably and people began feeling sorry for him. Then the officer-in-charge ordered the police officers to put away their guns and went over to Cliff who was sitting in the sand, still weeping.

“Okay, Cliff,” the officer-in-charge said. “I’ll let you try to talk to the turtle. But if the turtle threatens you or anyone else here, in any way, we will have to take action.”

“Oh, thank you, thank you!” Cliff said, looking up at the police officer.

Cliff then got up, brushed the sand from his shabby clothes, and began walking slowly toward the turtle.

“Take it easy, boy, take it easy. I’m not going to hurt you,” Cliff said, trying to reassure Larry.

While Cliff was approaching Larry, Larry was sizing up Cliff. Unlike other human beings, Cliff seemed to be friendly, and Larry liked making friends. So Larry decided to let Cliff come closer.

Finally Cliff was standing right in front of Larry. Then Cliff got down on his knees and looked straight into Larry’s eyes. Larry, unperturbed, looked straight back at Cliff. He liked Cliff’s face, with its long beard, shaggy hair and twinkling eyes, and knew instinctively that Cliff would not harm him.

“Oh, what a beautiful turtle you are,” Cliff said. Cliff then placed his hands on Larry’s shell and said, “Through me you shall talk.”

Skeptical but curious, the police and the crowd of onlookers

watching this strange spectacle moved closer to this unusual pair to hear what the turtle would say. In an instant, Cliff lapsed into a trance. Then, in a deep, powerful, and melodious voice that found expression through Cliff's now mechanical-like mouth, Larry began to talk.

“I am Larry. I was born on this beach, and came back to protect my little cousins from harm. The seagulls are my worst enemy because they kill so many of the little turtles, and you humans kill turtles too when you step on our nests. Please stop stepping on our nests. We want to be friends. We have a right to live. If I scared anyone, I am sorry, but I was sad and upset. Please understand. If you want to hurt me, go right ahead. I will not fight. But please do not harm the little baby turtles.”

The people who heard Larry's impassioned plea started weeping and soon Larry was surrounded by hundreds of people who wanted to touch him and be his friend. Larry soon forgot his anger and began making friends too. Larry showed his friendship by waving at the people with his flippers. Then with a final wave of his flippers, Larry, now feeling joy, turned around and returned to the ocean.

As for Cliff, he went back to his dilapidated shack, fell asleep on his worn-out mattress, and dreamed sweet dreams about large, friendly turtles.

THE END