

Grandfather Marmot weaves a tale of invasion, greed and death

by Joseph James

Few persons realize that all animals can talk to each other, but they can and this is a story about one of them; or rather one of their stories, as told to someone who believes that they can talk.

I was sitting on a rock enjoying the afternoon sun, about half-way up to the top of Eagle Summit, when I heard a wee small voice beside me.

It sounded like a whistling, but ideograms formed inside my head, pictures that make a language.

It was a marmot, an old marmot and he was fussing because I was sitting on his story-telling rock. I apologized and moved to another rock just a little ways off. I guess he didn't understand human talk because he continued berating my lack of manners, even after my apology, but then he seemed to forget that I was there and started telling a story to the other marmots. Grandfather Marmot (that's what I named him) hesitated a moment to work a flower petal out from between his teeth, then he began:

A long time ago, when I was still a pup, strangers came to our land, lemmings they called themselves. At first there were only a few of them and lived at peace with us. Then after many seasons had passed, they became

many in number.

They had eaten all their food and much of ours. They chased some of us out of our own dens and took them over. Eventually they had moved us completely out except for a few places here and there. Then one day they said that they wanted that too. They were many and we were few. What could we do? So we told them that the first ones there could have it all.

As soon as they heard this a great excitement came over them, and they began to run, to be first to get what little that we had left. It was all we could do to keep from getting trampled in their mad rush, they went by us so fast that we wondered how they could ever stop. And they didn't stop, the first ones got pushed by the rest and the last ones could only see dust.

If they had only known that as they kept pushing us out of our dens, season after season, that they had finally pushed us until our backs were to the great waters. Except for our thin perimeter of dens, there was nothing left to be had beyond the cliffs, nothing at all. I do not know where they have gone to but they have been gone now for so long that some of you younger pups won't believe me, that there ever were any such things as lemmings. But it's true, every word.