

## **A Headscratch of Mysteries (picture book manuscript)**

**by Peter Pearson**

It all started the night before the masquerade. The hawks were just sitting down to dinner, when...

“What happened to our pan?” said the kettle of hawks. “We cannot eat!”

They asked their neighbors, the sharks. “Have you seen our pan?”

“We’re too cold for that,” said the shiver of sharks. “Our coats are missing. Have you seen them?”

“We have not. But we’ll look for them while we look for our pan,” said the hawks.

They asked the ravens next. “Have you seen our pan? Or some coats?”

“Get lost,” said the unkindness of ravens. “Who cares about pans and coats when our favorite hats are missing? What will we wear to the masquerade?”

All of their neighbors were missing something. The bed of clams was missing its sheets. The band of gorillas was missing its drums. The walk of snails was missing its boots. The knot of toads couldn’t even find its shoelaces.

“This is serious,” said the congress of baboons. “We vote for something expensive.”

So they hired a sleuth of bears.

The bears looked all around. They poked. They peeked. They asked questions. The congregation of crocodiles was too busy singing, and the pandemonium of parrots all talked at once. The gaze of raccoons just stared.

The sleuth of bears returned.

“What’s the word?” asked the tiding of magpies. “Find anything?”

“Nothing,” said the bears. “That’ll be five honeycombs.”

“Outrageous!” said the business of ferrets.

“Fine,” sighed the richness of martens. “We’ll pay.”

The animals tried to get ready for the masquerade, but it was no use. The sharks shivered. The clams yawned. The gorillas tried to learn tambourine and the hawks made lunch in a slipper. They couldn’t believe someone had taken their things.

“What a dirty trick!” said the earth of foxes.

“We’ll never see our things again,” sobbed the cry of hounds. “Never, never, never.”

The masquerade came anyway. The ravens looked ridiculous in their second-best hats, but no one said anything. Suddenly, they heard a booming deep in the forest.

“What’s that sound?” whispered the murmur of starlings.

“Not us,” said the crash of rhinoceros.

A strange creature wobbled out of the woods. It was taller than the tower of giraffes. Wider than the bloat of hippopotami. Its white skin billowed. Its percussive hands crashed together. It shook its stringy hair and stomped its terrible boots. The creature wobbled closer. And closer. And closer.

“A monster!” cried the scream of swifts.

“Run!” yelled the streak of tigers.

“Wait a minute,” said the shrewdness of apes. “That stuff looks familiar.”

The other animals looked.

“Our sheets!”

“Our coats!”

“Our hats!”

“Our drums!”

“Our boots!”

“Our shoelaces!”

“Our pan! Our lovely, beautiful pan!”

The bears pulled off the sheets, and tiny animals scampered away.

“A mischief of mice,” said the bears. “We should have known.”

“Hooray!” cried the exaltation of larks.

“Let’s celebrate!” said the party of jays.

“Whew!” said the murder of crows. “That scared us half to death!”

The band of gorillas tuned their instruments. The sharks put on their coats. The clams wrapped up in their sheets. The ravens wore their hats. The snails stepped into their boots, the toads laced their shoes, and the hawks fried up enough food for everyone, even a few mice. The masquerade continued deep into the night.

But when the hawks got home, they hid their pan where no mouse would ever find it: underneath a clutter of cats.

## Author's Note

While the names for the different groups of animals may sound strange, they are all quite real. In fact, most of the names have been around for hundreds of years. Some names are used for many different kinds of animals, like “pod,” which can be a group of dolphins, porpoises, seals, walruses, or whales. Some names go with only one kind of animal—only badgers come in a “cete.” And some animals have different names depending on what they’re doing. Geese can be called a “gaggle” or “flock” if they’re on the ground, a “plump” if they’re flying close together, and a “team,” “wedge,” or “skein” if they’re flying further apart. Here are some more:

- a charm of hummingbirds
- a smack of jellyfish
- a siege of cranes
- a flink of cows (twelve or more)
- a parliament of owls
- an implausibility of gnus
- a prickle of porcupines
- a bouquet of pheasants (when flushed from hiding)
- a romp of otters
- a zeal of zebras

What other names can you think of? What would you call a group of socks? Or chairs?

Or parents?