

The Kingdom of Circles and Triangles

A Fairy Tale for Grown Ups

by Sarah Gibbard Cook

Once upon a time, there was a kingdom where everybody was either a circle or a triangle. The ruler of the kingdom was a triangle. Triangles ran all the government departments and most of the businesses. They had most of the money and all the best jobs. Circles and triangles both worked very hard.

One day the Kingdom of Circles and Triangles decided to become a democracy. Everybody agreed it would be better to treat everyone equally. The ruler changed the laws to make everyone equal and then resigned.

“Now maybe I can have a good position too,” a young circle said to itself. “I’m smart, and I work hard.”

“Good,” said the triangle in charge. “Everyone is equal now. Why don’t you apply?”

The day of the interview, the circle washed its round face and shined its shoes. It put on its best clothes. Soon it took its seat in front of the panel of triangles who would make the decision.

“I’m smart, and I work hard,” the circle said. “What else would you like to know about me?”

“How well do you keep your balance?” the head triangle asked. “We learned long ago that it’s important to sit solidly on one side and not roll to the right or the left.”

“I’m sure I could learn to balance well,” the circle replied. “I can also move very fast when necessary by rolling toward my destination.”

“Rolling is not a useful skill,” the head triangle said. “We learned long ago to manage the kingdom without rolling, and we see no need to begin rolling now.”

Another triangle on the panel spoke up. “What interests me most is perspective. We need someone who can see three sides to every issue.”

“I can see an infinite number of sides,” the circle said. “I can weigh them all equally and understand even the most complicated issues in a balanced, even-handed way.”

“That sounds worse than useless,” the triangle said. “You will never be able to make a decision. No, the important skill is to be able to see three sides.”

“I’m sure I can do that, too,” the circle said.

After the interview, the panel sent the circle into a nearby room where there was a machine to measure balance and perspective. “To make sure we treat everyone equally, we use a machine that has no way to know whether you are a circle or a triangle.”

“That sounds fair,” the circle said.

When the circle got home, its friends asked, “How did it go? Did you get the position?”

“No, I’m not good enough at balance and perspective,” the circle said. “If I keep working at it, I’m sure I can learn to stand still without rolling to the right or the left. And I know I can learn to see exactly three sides to every issue. I wish I hadn’t wasted my school days on learning to roll fast or see an infinite number of sides to everything.”

“If we teach our children the skills of stable balance and three-sided perspective, they will grow up to get better positions than ours. What wonders the future holds for them,” the circles agreed. “Aren’t you glad we finally live in a democracy where everyone gets treated equally?”