

Thank You

Toon Tellegen's work has been translated into thirty-six languages. Books in English include:

PROSE FOR ADULTS

The Cricket's Healing (Pushkin Press, 2026, translated by David Colmer; original title *De genezing van de krekel*)

The Hedgehog's Dilemma (Pushkin Press, 2025, translated by David Colmer; *Het verlangen van de egel*)

POETRY

Raptors (Carcenet Press, 2011, translated by Judith Wilkinson; *Raafvogels*)

A Slippery Slope (Shoestring Press, 2023, translated by Judith Wilkinson; *Tot de winter er op volgt and Langs een helling*)

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

I Wish (Elsewhere Editions, 2020, translated by David Colmer; *Ik wou*)

The Squirrel's Birthday and Other Parties (Boxer Books, 2023, translated by Martin Cleaver; *De verjaardag van de eekhoorn*)

Letters to Anyone and Everyone (Boxer Books, 2023, translated by Martin Cleaver; *Brieven aan niemand anders*)

Toon Tellegen

Thank You

*Animal Stories
to Show Your
Gratitude*

Translated by
David Colmer



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The ant and the squirrel had gone out for a walk to the edge of the forest. It grew dark and they sat down in the grass under a tree they didn't know.

It was cold and every now and then rain fell or wet snow settled on their shoulders.

They didn't say very much to each other and resolved to never go for a walk like this again. If only we were home, they thought. But neither of them said that. They shivered and huddled closer together.

'I am so cold...' the ant said suddenly, as another shower beat down on her.

The squirrel raised his tail, shook it out and laid it carefully over the ant. The tip of the tail ended exactly in the middle of her forehead.

'Thank you,' the ant mumbled.

The squirrel thought, if the ant asks me now if I'm cold, I'll say no, because she doesn't have anything to put over me...

A little later, the ant rolled onto her side, under the squirrel's tail, and asked, 'Aren't you cold, Squirrel?'

'No,' the squirrel said, trying to make his shivering as inconspicuous as possible.

'If you were cold,' the ant asked, 'would you say so?'

'No. I'd keep it to myself.'

'So you could be cold right now...'

Oh, thought the squirrel, what am I supposed to say to that? He thought for a moment and then said, 'I never feel the cold, Ant, no matter what.'

The ant didn't reply. But a little later she said, 'If I slide over a little, you can fit under your tail too.'

The squirrel hadn't thought of that.

They turned and twisted and, after struggling for a while, finally managed to lie under the tail together. But they couldn't change position and they both had one shoulder that stuck out in the open air.

'Shh,' the ant said when the squirrel went to say something.

They lay there like that and fell asleep. In

the middle of the night, it started hailing. The squirrel woke with a start and felt the hailstones hitting his tail.

‘Ow,’ he said, as quietly as possible, so as not to wake the ant.

Then he fell asleep again and tried to dream of things that might warm him up: bubbling porridge, the sun, grass on the bank of the river in the summer, some letters he’d once received, and the desert.

When they woke in the morning, the sun was shining and they soon recognised the tree they were lying under.

‘Did you sleep well, Ant?’ the squirrel asked.

‘Very well,’ the ant said. ‘Almost wonderfully.’



One morning the wind delivered a letter to the squirrel.

The squirrel was curious to see what it was and opened it right away.

Wish List

A grain of sugar.

No knocking on the door. No dancing.

No singing. No celebrating.

No happening to drop by, either.

Put down the grain of sugar and leave immediately.

Don't give any more or anything else.

Do not shout, 'Happy birthday, Sandfly.'

Do not wait for 'Thank you'.

No little surprises.

No peering from behind a tree to see if I come out.

No getting angry.

The sandfly

That's clear, thought the squirrel after reading the wish list. He picked up a grain of sugar and set off.

Animals were approaching from all directions.

'Where are you going?' he asked.

'To the sandfly's,' they said. 'You?'

'Me too.'

Closer to the sandfly's house, they started walking faster. They put down their grain of sugar and raced off again.

Nobody stayed to peer from behind a tree and nobody shouted, 'Happy birthday, Sandfly!'

By the time the sun set, there was an enormous mound of sugar in front of the sandfly's house.

The moon rose and the mound glittered and gleamed.

Looking in all directions, the sandfly slipped out late that night to bring in the grains of sugar one after the other. She hid them in her cupboard, under her floor and in her small, dark attic.

Then she got into bed, pulled the blanket up

over her, rubbed her antennae together in the dark and whispered, 'Thank you.'



The nightingale was celebrating his birthday behind a wall.

I am so plain, he thought. He buried his head in his feathers and felt worthless.

Whenever he heard someone coming, he called, 'Just throw your present over the wall.'

The guest shouted, 'Happy birthday, Nightingale!' threw the present over the wall and waited until the nightingale had unwrapped it.

'Hm,' he said each time. 'Yes, that's a good present. Thank you.'

Then he tossed a cake back over the wall for the guest. Towards evening, the nightingale was sitting on one side of the wall surrounded by presents and the rest of the animals were sitting together on the other side.

'Is my birthday fun?' he called.

'Sure,' the animals called back and wiped the crumbs off their beaks and mouths. 'We're wait-

ing,' they said quietly to each other. Their eyes were gleaming.

When it was completely dark, the nightingale began to sing. The animals sat and listened in complete silence. The nightingale sang about how, long ago, the sun never set but had wings he flapped while flying slowly through the sky, and he sang about the moon and how, at that time, she still swam in the river at night.

The animals bowed their heads. The nightingale's song seemed to come to life and climb over the wall to float over their heads. They could see the sun's wings before them and how he left them somewhere one day and couldn't find them again and kept searching, over and over again, every day, high in the sky and, in the dark, under the world. Fiery and desperate. But he never found them. And they saw the moon, who swam out of the river and up into the sky to help the sun search at night. She swam higher and higher, she was so light.

Suddenly the song ended.

'There,' the nightingale said. 'Now my birthday's over. Bye.'

He thought he was worthless again and hid

his head under his feathers once more.

The animals thanked him and walked back home in silence. Every now and then they sighed and hoped that the nightingale's birthday would come again soon or that he'd have something else to celebrate. But you can't count on that, they thought, and shook their heads.



The squirrel gazed wide-eyed at the world around him. It was a hot day in summer and the blade of grass was shooting up out of the dark soil, green and sharp. And there was the pebble with its wavy grey stripes, and there the beech root he'd just tripped over and next to which he was now gazing wide-eyed at the world. The world!

The squirrel shook his head and decided to look at the world more closely. He picked up the pebble and saw a couple of small holes in the middle. Bringing it up to his eye, he saw a speck of dust at the bottom of one of the holes, and walking across the middle of that speck of dust, with tears in his eyes, in which a window was reflected, at which...

Just then, the squirrel felt a hand on his shoulder.

'Wait a sec!' he called, but a shadow had fallen over the hole in the pebble. He turned

and found himself looking straight into the friendly face of the giraffe.

‘Squirrel!’ the giraffe said.

The squirrel frowned and said, ‘You’re interrupting, Giraffe. I was seeing more and more of the world; I could see further and further, almost through a window... and right in that moment, you showed up...’

‘Are you coming?’ the giraffe asked, swinging her head a little to one side.

‘Where?’

‘On a voyage of discovery.’

‘To discover what?’

‘Goodness, if I knew that, it wouldn’t be a voyage of discovery any more.’

The squirrel sighed. Voyages of discovery were so tiring. There were so many of them. And every time you discovered something else. It was always the same. He threw the pebble low over the dirt of the path so that it made a whizzing sound and disappeared in the bushes.

‘Fine,’ he said. ‘Let’s go on a voyage of discovery.’

He shuffled along behind the giraffe in the direction of the edge of the forest. There they

discovered the ant, who was having a nap, and the bear, who was sucking a honey-smeared object. They also discovered how hot the day was and sat down on the bank of the ditch that ran along the side of the meadow, where together they discovered how easy it is to fall asleep at the edge of the world.