
THIS IS MINE
MIKE DE SOUSA

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WHAT IS AND NEVER OWNED

Mike de Sousa

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THIS IS MINE

It is morning.

I know you well.

You know me well.

We are family.

You load the water that will keep us all alive. No words pass between us. You ask I help through the weight and kindness of your touch.

I pause.

You do not rush me.

I turn to you:

I will climb.

I look towards the dry, steep hillside.

With each breath I fill with the scent and strength of all I love: those I have been parted from, those I share my life with, the earth, and sky.

I climb.

. . .

The trail of our sweat strengthens as the day spreads. When you sense I grow tired as the load grows heavier, you wait, patiently.

We have worked this way, together, from times when the ground is cold and bare, to times of warmth and wild flower. We share this coming, going, and returning of our world.

You begin to sing. I like this sound. It is proud, hopeful. You sing as the track before us levels out and our home is just within sight in the far distance.

. . .

We are with family. There are many, all with different shapes and sizes. We share food and water, the day, evening, and night.

As the stars move across the sky I remain awake as everyone else sleeps.

I listen to my kind who are far from here. They share their stories of good news and struggle. I am bound with them, and by the memory of their voices.

Long into the darkness, I lie down, dream, and sleep.

. . .

During my dreamtime I drift from this place to another I know that is as real. To those of my inner life and longest memory: I live here, nightly, until the faintest light of day begins.

. . .

Now, I am awake, gazing at the beauty of the budding dawn. Gradually, one by one, my family wakes and each greets me with happiness and tender words. The youngest, with high voice and innocence, sits on my shoulders and rests their head against my coarse thick upright mane of hair. I hear them whisper:

I love you.

. . .

Mid morning, as your family has for many generations, you and I walk back down the hillside. At the bottom of the hill a roaring machine and men wait for us. We continue as we have often passed their taunts:

God gave this land to me and mine, not to you and yours.

This time it is different.

As we reach them, their rage grows. In an instant you are set upon and held firm by three men.

A rope that is anchored to the wheeled machine is tied tight around me.

You shout and struggle as the machine pulls me.

My walk is forced into a trot.

I try to match the speed of the machine but I cannot keep up.

I stumble. The machine carries on.

I am dragged on the ground as I bray.

I bray my story to the many of my kind who hear fifty miles in every direction. Each that hears passes on my testament. My voice is carried far from this place.

. . .

I close my eyes.

I have stopped breathing, my spirit remains, strong.

I am with dream, my family, and the child that whispers gently to me.

This is mine.



YOUR CHOICE : STOP HERE, OR CARRY ON

Some readers prefer a story is left to be read on its own. Others find value in broader discovery. Either approach is equally valid.

What follows provides you with a choice.

Stop here if you wish to ponder on the story without the distraction of other ideas.

Carry on, if you wish to explore the background, politics, ethics, and relationships of the story.

Without what follows, there is no choice.



THIS IS MINE: AUTHOR’S COMMENTARY

What I Own, What I Want To Own, What I Will Never Own.

Ownership as a legal or economic category is recoverable; relational loss is not.

The humans on both sides of this story are in conflict over something recoverable (land, an animal, a claim) while what is actually destroyed is irreversible (a bond, a life, a family's means of continuing to live on their land).

Each act of "this is mine" costs the person claiming something they do not intend to lose, even as it costs the dispossessed everything. Those who kill the donkey do not only take a family's animal: in the story's moral universe, they also diminished their own capacity for encounters with "what is other". In this story, the moral injury is to the one who harms, not only to the one who suffers.

The genesis of “This Is Mine” began after I read a news report about a donkey in the South Hebron Hills of The West Bank being tied to and dragged by a vehicle until it died. Donkeys serve as a practical lifeline for Palestinian villagers and are valued beyond their daily use. However, they have also become frequent targets of harassment, theft, and intense cruelty.

I wanted to tell a story that gave back this donkey a life beyond its brutal death. I wanted to mark its dignity, and to speak about human frailty, cruelty, and ownership. I wanted to write a story for all ages, yet also one that did not turn away from pain and loss. The story reaches towards universal themes of possession, insecurity, and the sense of self-advantage and entitlement that lies at the heart of human conflict. If the story succeeds, it shows how, even when deadly force is used, what is most profoundly owned is through relationships and memory: lives lived with others, love given and received.

The innocent, represented by the donkey, are given no rights, choice, or dignity by those asserting the land as theirs alone: in their senseless minds, the innocent have no value except in their suffering and as a means to instil fear and control.

Wherever force is used to expel a population, in time, that force expires. The shame and tragedy is how many suffer and perish before its downfall.

Material ownership is temporary. Whatever I consider my own remains at most, during my lifetime. I can never own the land, sea, and sky, although I can pretend to think I do for the short period of my presence on earth. Those things of most importance, that are truly mine, cannot be owned by anyone but me: the kindness, compassion, beauty and love I give, and with good fortune, at times receive.

Belonging Without Possession

This story gives most of its time to a life, rather than to the brutality that ends it.

Before the rope and the machine, there is a hillside, water to carry, a familiar touch, a song. There is a home approached in the distance, and others sleeping beneath the stars. Voices are heard in darkness, and a child rests against the donkey at dawn.

These ask us to attend to what exists before harm: a life with attachments, a body with limits, and relationships formed through repeated encounters. The donkey matters before it suffers. Its death does not create its dignity or purpose within the narrative.

Knowing And Meaning

The opening is direct:

“It is morning.”

“I know you well.“

“You know me well. “

“We are family.“

“I know you well” suggests familiarity accumulated over time, without necessarily claiming complete understanding.

That distinction becomes important as the story unfolds. The farmer and donkey do not need to share the same experience of the hillside for their relationship to have meaning. One loads the water; the other carries it. They have different bodies, capacities, and responsibilities. Yet the farmer can notice fatigue and waits.

The pause before “I will climb” deserves particular attention. It interrupts what might otherwise seem an automatic sequence: a human loads an animal, and the animal moves. Here, the donkey pauses, and the farmer does not rush.

The story does not resolve questions surrounding the use of animals for work. The donkey remains within an arrangement shaped by humans. What it offers is a glimpse of conduct within that unequal relationship: the more powerful participant makes room for the other’s pace.

Care appears not as the disappearance of difference, but as attention to it.

What Is Carried

Water is the first thing we see the donkey carry. It is "the water that will keep us all alive".

This gives the work a material seriousness. The journey is not decorative rural scenery. Someone must bring water home, and the donkey’s body helps make that possible. Its labour belongs to the family’s daily survival.

Yet the donkey carries more than water. With each breath it draws strength from those it loves: the living, the absent, the earth and sky. The physical burden and the inner life occupy the same passage without becoming the same thing.

This is one of the story's moments of revelation. An animal used for work is allowed an existence beyond its usefulness. It has something of its own that the work does not exhaust.

The opening “We are family” also broadens as we read. Later, the family contains “many with different shapes and sizes.” The story does not carefully sort them into human and animal categories. Food, water, evening and sleep are shared, though not necessarily experienced alike.

To belong together, here, is not to become interchangeable.

The World Beyond The Household

The donkey's attachments reach beyond those who live nearby.

At night it listens to its own kind, far away. There are also those from whom it has been parted, and those encountered in its "inner life and longest memory". The household is therefore not the whole of its world.

This matters to the question of ownership. Even a loving human relationship cannot account for everything the donkey is. The farmer may know the animal well without possessing its memories, its bonds with others, or whatever remains beyond human recognition.

The first-person voice invites us towards that life. It cannot deliver the life to us completely.

There is a tension here worth keeping open. The donkey speaks in human language, and the story gives articulate form to experiences we cannot fully enter. That is an imaginative act, not transparent access to another being. But refusing all such imagination would carry its own risk: leaving the animal visible only as property, labour, or an injured body.

The story asks whether we can approach an unfamiliar life without claiming to have finished understanding it.

When A Claim Becomes Force

The men’s declaration is not merely another expression of attachment:

"God gave this land to me and mine, not to you and yours".

Its structure divides the world. "Me and mine" is established through the exclusion of "you and yours". What follows makes that exclusion physical.

This is where the wider setting matters in a principled sense. Land is not only a surface over which ownership is disputed. It is where water is reached, food is grown, animals graze, families travel, and generations make their lives. The ability to interrupt those activities gives a claim consequences far beyond its wording.

People may speak the same possessive language while having very different powers to enforce it, and very different responsibilities for what follows. Recognising those differences is essential. Otherwise, an account of competing claims can conceal who is being restrained, who is losing access, and who can make the machine of power to end lives, move.

The story keeps these consequences close to the body. It does not ask the donkey to explain the politics of territory. It shows a familiar journey becoming impossible.

Earlier, the farmer waits when the donkey tires. Now:

“I stumble. The machine carries on.“

The contrast is devastating because it is so plain. In one relationship, a bodily limit receives attention. In the other, it changes nothing.

A Voice Spreads Far And Wide

“Bray” is close to the word pray. The donkey’s braying transforms a cry of pain into a story heard and passed on.

Its expansive reach may be read as a departure from the closely observed physical world into fable, although it should be noted

that donkey's have extraordinarily good hearing, and that under the right conditions their bray can be heard for over fifty miles by other donkeys. In the story, the donkey's voice travels beyond the place where its body is being dragged. What the men do is no longer confined to what they can control or to what the farmer can witness.

There is also a return here to the earlier night scene. The donkey first listens to the voices of its kind; later, its own voice enters that listening world.

It is not only a speaker demanding attention. It has already been a listener.

That sequence gives the cry a history. The animal belongs to relationships that precede the attack, and the story imagines those relationships carrying its account beyond it.

The Child’s Words

At dawn, the child whispers:

“I love you.“

At the end, the remembered or dream-present voice whispers:

“This is mine.“

The movement between these phrases is tender, but not entirely uncomplicated.

“This is mine” may sound like attachment, recognition, or the wish to keep a beloved being close. Yet it remains a possessive phrase. Love does not automatically make every claim harmless, and the story does not replace the words with something beyond question.

Instead, it places them beside the men’s declaration and asks us to hear the difference in their circumstances: the whisper

and the taunt, the resting head and the restraining hands, the relationship lived over time, and the claim imposed through violence.

Those differences do not make every question disappear. They make careful judgement possible.

The ending also holds death and continuing presence together. “I have stopped breathing” is unequivocal. “My spirit remains, strong” does not restore the body. It opens another register in which dream, memory, family and love remain present.

Some readers may hear spiritual continuity. Others may hear the persistence of a life in those who remember it. Neither reading needs to turn the death into a necessary passage towards something better. The loss remains a loss.

Returning To The Beginning

After the final words, the opening may sound different.

“We are family” can now be heard not only as a description of affection, but as something tested by the story: what does belonging ask of those who have more power? What does it mean to know another well while allowing that other to remain more than we know?

Further readings might follow the moments of waiting. Or the changing sounds: silence, song, taunt, bray, whisper. Or the different things that carry a life: water, work, memory, voices.

None of these pathways exhaust the story.

Perhaps the story’s deepest invitation is to stay with the difference between having something, belonging with someone, and taking care of a life that is not our own.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mike de Sousa is a content philanthropist who creates social and environmental publications, music, literature, and art.

Mike's work is available at Art Lover VIP, and you are welcome to visit Mike's personal site where you can discover more about him.

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