

The Great Banquet

(Fall web worm)

These creatures are seen all over the roadside trees just as school begins in the fall. While they may not appear to be one of the more beautiful or exciting inhabitants of nature, it is this ordinariness itself which makes them a good topic for sparking the children's interest in all that lives around them.

"Goodbye," Mama waved with her white, satin wings. "Sleep well, little ones; you have a big job ahead of you." And off Mama fluttered, her soft, spotted white wings gently flapping in the breeze. Below her, huddled closely together, her babies slept soundly, safely hidden in their egg cradles, on the underside of a leaf.

Sun rose and set, and the babies slept. Moon rose and Moon set and the babies slept. Day after day, creatures of the wood scurried about and the babies slept, safely hidden in their egg cradles. Night after night, the babies slept safely hidden in their egg cradles, on the underside of a leaf, and all the while, they were growing. Finally, when Sun had risen and set seven times . . . finally, when Moon had grown from a half moon to a great, round full moon . . . finally, when seven days and nights had passed, the babies began to crawl out of their eggs. One, then two, then twenty, then fifty, then hundreds of fuzzy little caterpillars crawled out of their eggs. Thousands of little legs scurried out to the ends of the branches.

Now there was work to be done. As quickly as they could, the tiny caterpillars crawled out to the ends of the branches and worked together to build the banquet hall. From twig to twig they used their heads to stretch the silken lines. Over, under, around again, until at last they had built a great hall. Then, for just a moment, they sat still to rest. Hundreds of caterpillars, thousands of legs, rested.

And then the call went out: "Let the feasting begin!" And for just a moment, hundreds of caterpillars looked from one edge of the banquet hall to the other, surveying the great feast before them. Then thousands of legs began marching from leaf to leaf, eating as quickly as they could.

Hour after hour they ate, until the fuzzy caterpillars had grown full, and then they rested - and they grew. Until again the call went out: "Let the feasting resume!" Hundreds of caterpillars on thousands of legs headed back to the banquet tables. But what? What was this? The tables were empty! From one to another they looked. Across the great tables they looked: there was no more food in the banquet hall. What would they do? "Make the hall bigger," called the biggest caterpillar - and in an instant they headed out of the banquet hall and right next door. From twig