

**The Adventures
of
Horacio Hummingbird
A Far Far Place**

by
Joel B. Kirkpatrick

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One

The Bright Light

I felt the rush of wind as I was knocked from the limb.

I could feel the crushing grip of the snake, as its mouth closed around me. The deadly fangs missed my body. But as its mouth closed around me, I lost my breath. For a moment... I wondered if Heather was ok. But the crushing grip of the snake was more than I could bear.

The darkness consumed me. And then... I was falling through the air... and the pain in my chest eased...

As quickly as the snake had struck... a new blinding light flooded my entire being.

And then...

.
. .
.

I could hear something...

It was very faint... and it sounded far away.

I opened one eye... But all I saw was the darkness that surrounded me.

I let out a sigh and closed my eye and tried to find that peaceful place I had just been a moment before. But something wouldn't let me go back there. Something kept nagging at me to open my eye again, and I look into the darkness.

I heard something. I didn't move a muscle. It was a buzzing sound. And then it stopped. I didn't want to move, but my eye betrayed me and slowly crept open again. Nothing... nothing but darkness... I closed my eye and listened... waiting to see what was going to happen next. I listened with all my might. There it was again, that buzzing sound. I listened as the sound grew fainter... and then it faded into the darkness that surrounded me. Ahhh...! peace at last...

It was quiet... too quiet. I opened my eye again. Something was there. I couldn't quite make it out, but I could sense it. I could see a slight difference in the darkness now. There was an interesting difference. The darkness was changing in front of me. I looked at it. It was defiantly different than all the rest of the darkness that surrounded me. It was just a shade lighter. Curious I thought.

I cautiously moved my head just a bit to get a better look at it. Then I felt like stretching. No! I must not move! But my body ached to move. I couldn't repress this feeling, and I shifted slightly. But I couldn't move very far.

I pushed against the darkness that confined me, but I was stopped. I pushed again, harder this time. A loud cracking noise echoed, and reverberated through my bones. A piercing white light shot through the darkness and jabbed my eye with

pain. I closed my eye tightly against the blinding light. I waited a moment, and listened intently.

The pain eased a bit, and I began to open my eye again. Slowly... very slowly, I opened my eye.

There, in front of me, was a crooked gash of brilliant white light. Never moving, but piercing my peaceful little world. I looked at this apparition and thought, how strange that I had never seen this before. It had been dark as long as I could remember. I closed my eye... and waited. Maybe it will go away I thought.

But it didn't go away! And when I opened my eye again, it was still there. Something was happening. Something was changing. I had been very content in my dark and safe little world. But now, I had something new to deal with.

I was not sure how I felt about this new white light invading my dark peaceful little world. But it looked like it was NOT going to go away.

So, I would have to learn how to deal with it. There didn't appear to be any danger now. It just stayed there, in one spot. Piercing my dark world.

I felt another surge of energy flow through my body and I stretched again. CRACK! The light grew and streaked into brighter gashes across my dark little world.

I must stop stretching I thought to myself. But as I closed my eye to the pain of the brilliant light, I felt my body push again. I pushed harder than I had ever pushed before. I tried to stop myself, but I couldn't. My body ached to stretch, and again I felt it push.

There was a loud CRACK and a POP! Though I had my eyes closed, I could tell that it was brighter than it had been. I s-l-o-w-l-y opened my eye.

There, in front of me, I saw a big hole. Not just a hole, but a hole with colors.

For the first time I saw greens and browns and blacks and blues, all sitting in this little hole in front of me.

How beautiful these colors were. And they moved! I had never seen anything move like that before. In fact I don't remember seeing anything move at all!

It was wonderful, this small speck of color and movement that had opened up in front of me. The wonderful colors all melted together inside of this little hole.

I pushed again. It felt good to push and stretch. Another loud CRACK and POP!

The darkness was gone! I was surrounded by color and movement and sound. It was wonderful, beautiful! It was glorious!

There were greens and browns and grays, blues and yellows and reds. I pushed once more and I was free. Free from the darkness I had known my whole life.

The small amount of pain that I had first endured had been worth the effort.

I could feel a gentle breeze across my skin. It felt cold. I felt wet and cold.

This was new! But I could deal with it.

I tried to sit up on my newly found tiny legs, but I fell over on my side.

I closed my eyes to all the brightness and color. There was a lot to deal with right now. But I had legs! Wow! I wiggled my tiny toes. I could feel all sorts of things!

I tried to sit up again, but only managed to roll over and fall to the other side. It was a hard thing to do, to lift my body upright. I rested for a moment, and then tried again.

This time I fell back where I started, on my other side. But it didn't hurt, it felt good. It felt really 'really' good. I rested again...

I tried again... and this time I made it up and found my head wobbling as I tried to remain on top of my tiny legs. But... 'Nooooo...!' back on my side again...

This is NOT going to beat me! So again I pushed up, and this time I made it. As I started to fall again, I felt my tiny feet shift automatically under me, and they helped me balance.

A cool breeze brushed across my skin again, and I felt cold.

I flapped my stubby wings, and almost fell over again. But I was getting stronger!

I felt the air circulate through my nest, and it felt warm. I flapped my wings again, and they began to dry in the warm breeze.

I could feel each part of my body as the gentle breeze moved across my nest and dried each part of my wrinkled body.

This was great! What a great feeling it was to be out of the darkness. I flapped my wings and felt nice and warm. But there was a problem.

I felt a pain half way to my tiny feet. I looked down, but I couldn't understand what was causing the pain. I flapped my wings and felt warm again. I heard a faint buzzing sound. I knew that sound... I heard it before, when I was surrounded by darkness.

It grew louder and louder. I looked up in the direction of the sound. At first all the colors were a blur. But then I saw movement. And then, I saw her!

I looked, and on the edge of the nest was the most beautiful creature I had ever seen.

It was my mother! I don't know how I knew that this iridescent creature was my mother. I just knew it! She had beautiful feathers all over her body.

She sat on the edge of our nest for a moment and then leaned toward me. She touched my beak with hers and I felt the sweet warm liquid flow into my mouth.

It was wonderful. I felt the dull pain in my middle fade away. This was good...!

I looked down. Had this wonderful warm liquid made the pain go away? I heard a loud buzz and looked up. She was gone. Just as quickly as she had arrived, she vanished.

I wanted more of this sweet warm liquid!

I beat my wings furiously and I heard a slight buzzing sound. I stopped. I listened. All was quiet... except for the soft breeze that moved the world around me.

I flapped my wings again, and again I heard the buzzing sound. I flapped again, and again and again! Each time I heard the sound. I realized, it was 'ME'!

I heard a different buzzing sound. I looked up, and saw that it was my mother again. She was back with more of that sweet warm liquid. It tasted so good. I wanted more!

I flapped my wings again, and fell over on my side. This time, however, I knew my tiny legs would help me back into an upright position. I was defiantly getting better at this.

My wings and my body were almost completely dry now. And I was feeling pretty good.

I began to feel that gnawing little pain again. I wondered when I would get more... sweet... warm... liquid.

I looked around, and waited patiently.

'What a wonderful day it had been!'

I closed my eyes... and waited.

Two

Sweet Nectar

Days passed and I grew stronger. Little sticks began to grow out of my skin. They didn't hurt, so I ignored them. Soon, I was covered with these tiny little sticks. I thought they made me look ugly. But they still didn't hurt, so I continued to ignore them.

I was flapping around in the nest, always waiting for that sweet warm nectar from my mother. Flapping and waiting. Waiting and flapping. This seemed to be all that I did with my life. There must be more, I thought.

The days passed, and my sticks began to unfurl. They were feathers! I had feathers! Just like my mom! Well... they weren't exactly like hers, but they were REAL feathers. My very own feathers! I could feel each one as they grew out of my skin. And I could move them!

One day, as I waited for my mothers' return, I found that I could fly in one place. I could hover!

I could hold myself just above the nest, by flapping my wings very fast. Then I would touch down where I started. This was great stuff!

Just as I touched down, for the umpteenth time, I heard that familiar buzz that signaled my mothers returned.

"Mother...!" I shouted as I touched down.

"Did you see me? I was hovering!"

I held out my beak for the warm nourishment, that sweet nectar that I loved. I felt the sticky sweetness go deep inside and give me a recharge of energy. I greedily gulped my last drop, and asked...

"Where do you go when you leave?"

"Well Horice... Yes, I did see you hovering, and that was wonderful. As for where I go, I go to find lovely flowers with lots of nectar. I drink some nectar for me, and then I save some for you, and I bring it home for you to drink."

"Mother..." as I fluffed my feathers, "can I go with you some day to see the flowers?"

"Soon..." she said,

"Soon you will have the strength to fly with me, and together we will go and see all the lovely flowers. And I will show you how to find other things that are delicious and nourishing. Have you been practicing your hovering?"

"Yes, mom...!" I said excitedly "See...!" and I began to hover above the nest again.

"Very nice Horice..." she smiled. "did you know that you can fly backwards, and even straight up?"

I leaned my head slightly backwards in disbelief, and found myself crashing into the nest behind me. I fell over... and looked up.

"I think a little more practice..." she smiled,

"Yes, a little more practice and you can come with me."

I was thrilled! I began to practice harder than ever. I practiced every day. I found that I could kick off from the bottom of the nest, and flap my wings, and fly to the edge of the nest.

Once, I almost went too far, and almost went over the edge! It was scary. It was a long way down. But soon, I became master of our nest.

One morning, after my tummy was full, and I was ready for a short nap, my mother surprised me with something incredible.

"I think you are ready." she told me.

"Ready?" I asked.

"I'm ready...? Ready for what...?"

"Oh I think you just might be ready to follow me and see some lovely flowers today. How would you like that?"

She looked at me softly. Her eyes were shining brightly in the morning glow.

"Oh, am I...? Am I really ready...?"

"You have been practicing very hard, and I am so proud of you. So lets see what you can do... out of the nest." She looked so happy.

I loved see my mother happy.

"Now I want you to stay close to me, and do everything that I do." she said with a smile.

"Oh, OK! I promise I'll do my best... I will!" I could hardly wait.

"Promise...?" she asked, "I don't want to loose you just yet." she smiled at me again.

"Oh yes, I promise, promise, promise!"

I loved to see her soft eyes smiling.

"Yes mother... I promise." I settled down.

"Are you ready...?" she asked,

"Then, let's go!"

And with a very loud double buzz, we were off.

Down out of our nest through the limbs and branches toward the forest floor. I held my breath. I felt my stomach lurching up toward my beak as I fell through the air. I wanted to scream... I was...! 'S-C-R-E-A-M-I-N-G'...!

Just before she reached the ground, my mother arched her back and tail. She began to fly level with the forest floor. I followed right behind her, mimicking her every move. I don't

know how I did it, I just did it! I squealed at the top of my lungs! What a thrill it was to fly!

Soon I was flying right beside her, as we zipped through vines and by very big trees. There was so much to see, that while I was looking at a really, really big tree, I almost hit another one.

We hummed over hills and through lush valleys and up through thick vine covered ravines. It seemed that there were flowers everywhere. There was so much to see.

And then, the forest floor dropped out from under us. We were flying down a rocky slope with no trees or vines. As we neared the bottom of the slope, she arched her back and began a level flight just above the tree tops.

Then, I saw it! The open meadow in the middle of all these trees and vines... It was beautiful...! She nosed over and dropped down into the little meadow, and flew in a circle around its parameter. I followed close behind.

She stopped just above the floor of this little meadow, and began to hover. I was so busy looking at all the different flowers that I flew right by her. I made a quick turn, and flew back to where my mother was hovering.

"This is my favorite meadow Horice."

She began to show me how to fly from flower to flower, and find that wonderful sweet liquid.

We must have sampled each and every one. I learned quickly how I could hover right in front of each flower, stick my tiny beak in, and suck the sweet nectar out.

She flew to a tree near the edge of the meadow and lit on a small branch. I lit beside her and looked out across all the flowers.

"There are many meadows with flowers in this world Horice, but this is my favorite one. I always come back to this one."

It was an especially nice meadow I presumed, it was the first one I'd ever seen. There were flowers with white petals, red petals, purple petals, and some flowers had yellow petals. I really liked the red petals!

We sampled them all, or so it seemed. By the time the big yellow ball was high in the sky, I was getting good at this flying stuff. She taught me how to fly backwards, and sideways. And, she even showed me that it was possible to fly upside down!

I still hadn't figured that one out by the end of the afternoon... but I was trying...!

I saw her do it, so I knew it could be done! 'You can do anything Horice,' she told me, 'if you believe.' And I believed her.

She let me fly around by myself, while she watched from her perch high in the tree by the edge of the meadow. I flew sideways to the left. I flew sideways to the right. I flew

backwards. I flew straight up! And then, I flipped over and dove straight down! What a thrill this flying was!

Each time I began to feel weak, the nectar in the flowers gave me the energy to do it all again.

It made my tummy feel good, slurping nectar from these obliging flowers. In fact my full tummy made me feel GREAT! And FLYING made me feel GREAT!

At the end of the day I was so full and so tired, that I didn't think that I could make it home. But, I knew it was almost time to go home.

My mother flew down to me, and took me up to the tiny branch high in the tree, where she watched over me. We looked out over the valley, and out past the forest to the dark blue water that touched the sky in the distance. What a great day it had been. What a wonder, to look out past the forest and into the deep blue waters.

"Soon," she said as we looked out across the valley, "you will be able to go off on your own, and fly to a far far place. There, you will be able to drink nectar from flowers that you have never seen before."

"But mother..." I began, "what if I get lost...?"

"Well Horice... you can never be lost. The whole world is your home, and all the flowers in it are yours to drink from." She smiled as she looked down at me.

I didn't understand what she meant at the time. But I knew, that all she said, was for my own good.

She had shown and taught me so many new and wonderful things. She had shown me how to drink nectar from the flowers. She had shown me how to fly in new and incredible ways. And... She told me of lands that were far away, and about a certain star in the night sky that never moved.

What a great day it had been!

The bright yellow ball in the sky had slowly turned to orange and was sinking into the deep blue waters. It was time to head back to our nest.

We flew back across the forest, up the rocky slope, and through the trees and vines to our home. Then we snuggled in for the night.

I liked snuggling with my mother. She was warm. She made me feel warm. Safe... and warm...

I liked feeling safe and warm.

What a great day it had been.

What a great mom!

I slept...

Three

Green Snake, Yellow Monster

The next morning we were off early to find our favorite flowers. We flew back to the same valley and meadow we had explored the day before.

I found out that during the night, the flowers that I drank from, had replenished themselves with sweet nectar. This, my mother explained, was 'Natures' way of making sure that the flowers got pollinated. What ever that meant...?!

Another great day ended, and we settled into a familiar pattern of lessons and nectar. Sweet... sweet nectar!

One day, I felt like exploring. So I asked if I could go off on my own. Just a little... Not too far... I would go off exploring I said, and not venture too far... I promised...

It was a little scary at first, but I wanted to test myself. It was exciting just thinking about it!

Flying off on my own, exploring places I had never seen or been before.

"Are you sure you know the way home?" she asked, "Just in case..."

"Yes, mother... I'm sure. I won't go too far..." I promised that I would not fly too far from the familiar places we had

been to. I would fly just far enough to get that feeling of excitement! Then I would return to make sure she was still there. Just to be safe!

"Ok..." she said to me, "be careful... and I'll see you at home this evening."

"Remember... when the big yellow ball turns to orange, it's time to come home." she hovered in front of me and smiled.

"And Horice..." still smiling she said,

"I'm very proud of you."

I looked at her beautiful form, and in a blur, she was gone! I hovered there for a moment... watching her as she flew to the far side of the meadow and dropped down to examine some flowers. I could still make out her movements, but just barely.

Then, with a mighty surge of energy, I was on my way! I had my own flowers to examine and suck sweet elixir from. The excitement filled every feather on my body. I was super charged! I was ready to go!

I flew high. I flew low. I flew straight up. I looped over and flew down through trees and limbs and vines on the edge of our little meadow. I had finally even mastered flying up side down.

I flew out across tree tops in the familiar valley, and found more meadows to explore. Every meadow I found had

beautiful flowers. Each one, full of that sweet elixir that I craved.

Each time I found an especially nice meadow, or an interesting flower, I would fly back and tell my mom. Sometimes, I would find her high in a tree beside her favorite meadow, resting. Or, I would find her in the meadow sipping from one of the flowers. She would listen intently, while my exciting news flowed like nectar.

We spent many days exploring this valley and all the meadows it contained. We visited all the flowers that we had been to time and time again.

I hovered in front of the flowers and drank my fill. Then, I would buzz off again. Sometimes we flew together through the valley. And sometimes, we each flew to different meadows. We always found each other and shared new tales of our exciting day.

Sometimes I zigzagged through the vines and flowers that covered the ground of our little meadows. I flew fast... I flew slow... I flew sideways and backwards. I flew high... I flew low... I flew in great circles around the whole valley.

It was great fun! It was a wonderful time. And each day, when the yellow ball began to turn orange, we would find each other and fly home.

One day after showing off my flying skills to no one but myself, I noticed that the big yellow ball was turning to

orange. I knew it was time to head for home. So I flew back to my mothers' favorite meadow.

I looked for her... but she wasn't there. I flew around the whole valley, looking for her... but I couldn't find her any where.

I knew that she trusted me, and knew that I could find my own way home. Maybe this was a test I thought.

Maybe that's why she asked me if I was sure I could find my way home alone. It made sense! And it made me feel good that she had confidence in me and my ability to find my way home.

I smiled to myself, and then I was off... buzzing loudly in the direction of home. I flew up the rocky slope and into the forest in the direction I knew so well.

I saw all the trees that I knew. I knew the path that led to our home... and I knew it well.

I buzzed and buzzed through the forest, and soon I was approaching our nest. The light was growing dim as I spotted the tree where our home was.

But something was different...! I froze in mid air in front of our tree... Something didn't feel right...

I hovered there for a moment, and then moved slowly forward toward our nest.

The sound of my wings filled the still air around me. The wind was calm, and not a leaf was stirring. Then, I saw it!

A great green snake was coiled around our nest.

I stared at it.

It didn't move.

Its yellow eyes were locked on mine. I backed away, and found a small branch beneath my feet. I touched down. I gripped the branch tightly with my tiny feet... never looking down.

I never looked away from the snake... and it never moved its yellow eyes from me. I listened hard for my mothers buzz. I must warn her before she approaches the nest and the green monster! I watched... I waited... I listened. But her familiar hum never came.

It was dark now, but I could still make out the monsters yellow eyes in the pale light that drifted through the trees.

I closed my eyes for only a second, and jerked them open again! The snake was gone! I looked nervously around, but I couldn't see the terrible monster anywhere. He was gone!

I flew straight up through the canopy over our nest. I flew up into the safety of the clear sky above. I dropped back down to a tiny twig at the very top of our tree, and lit on it. I waited for my mother... But she never came home.

It was a long night... a miserable night.

I woke to the sound of trees crashing to the ground behind me! I heard loud roaring noises that I had never heard before!

A terrible smell drifted up to the top of the tree I was in. I looked around and there was a huge yellow monster pushing trees down to the forest floor.

It was moving toward our tree, and there was nothing in its wake but barren ground. I let go of the tiny twig under my feet just as the monster knocked our tree to the ground.

I watched in horror, as the tree that I had called home, crashed to the forest floor! I must find my mother, I thought. She will know what to do.

The smell was awful, the destruction was complete. I flew to a tree a short distance away and watched as men walked behind the big yellow monster and attacked the fallen trees with small noisy monsters they held in their hands. I had to get away from all this noise and destruction. I needed to find my mother.

I flew back to all of the familiar places in the little valley where we had sipped nectar together. Many were the same. But many were not.

They were missing the sound of my mothers hum.

I followed the path back toward my former home. It was gone... all gone. I lit in a nearby tree and looked out at what had been my happy world.

It was gone... It was all gone...

And so was my mother.

Four

The Lost Temple

As darkness fell, I looked across the barren ground where my home had been.

The shadows drifted over the emptiness. I watched the golden ball climb up into the velvet sky. Then, I remembered my mothers voice, 'Soon, you will be able to go off on your own and fly to a far far place.'

As I watched the shadows, I realized that the time had come. It was not the time of my choosing... but the time had come.

I flew up into the cool velvet night. Higher and higher I flew. Then I saw the star that never moved, and I began to fly toward it.

I flew on and on through the night. I yearned to get as far from those monsters as I possibly could. Those monsters had invaded and destroyed my world. One by stealth... and the other by brute force!

How could I fight against either of these two forces? I flew on...

The darkness below me sparkled with tiny lights from time to time, like the stars above me. The cool night air made me

shiver, but I was determined to get as far away as I possibly could.

I wasn't sure about the green snake... but I felt like he had something to do with my mothers disappearance. I might never know. But I DID know the brute power of the yellow monster. I saw it!

I flew on until I began to see a pale light to my right... chasing the darkness from the sky. To my left, the golden ball was melting into the ground, and I knew another day was about to begin.

I was starting to grow tired and weak so I began to look for a place in the forest to rest. I saw flowers, and there would be nectar to drink. But first, I must rest.

I found a comfortable looking tree and soon was ruffling my feathers as I clutched a sturdy limb with my tiny feet. I closed my eyes, took a deep breath.

I opened them and looked around for anything that might be slithering toward me. I was safe...

I would try to find comfort in the sleep that I hoped would chase away the events that had shaken my world. I closed my eyes for only a moment...

'QUARWK...!' came echoing through the silence!

My eyes flew open at the terrible sound. I flew immediately into a safe hover and looked around for the danger that made that horrible sound.

On a limb in front of me, was the strangest bird I had ever seen. It had a huge yellow beak. It had yellow and green feathers around its eyes and throat. The rest of his feathers were black except for a spot of red near his tail.

"Thomas Thaddeus Toucan..." he said in a raspy voice, "at your service."

"Uh...good morning..." I said as I lit back on my limb.

"I'm Horacio Hummingbird."

"Yes, yes..." he picked at the fruit he held in his right claw, then he turned to me...

"Care for some fig?"

"Uh, no thank you... I prefer nectar."

"Yes, yes... of course you do... lots of flowers around here." He looked around. "Haven't seen you before... you're not from around here, are you?"

"No," I said as I looked around "no sir, I'm not from here."

"Oh you don't have to call me 'SIR'," he began between bites of fig, "you can just call me Tom T., all my friends do."

"I'm your friend?" I asked.

This was my first friend. In fact, it was the first conversation that I had with anyone other than my mother.

"Of course you are." he laughed, then stopped eating and cocked his beak to one side and looked at me with one big eye.

"Don't you want to be my friend?" his eye narrowed...

"Oh yes, of course I do." I said.

As I sat there watching him eat, I began to tell him about the great green snake and the yellow monster, and how I had 'no home' any more. I don't know why, but it was easy for me to talk to him. After I finished my story, Tom T. looked all around...

"We have snakes here too... green ones and brown ones... big ones and little ones... and some that look just like that limb you're sitting on!"

I shot straight up into the air and looked down at the limb that I had been resting on! Suspended in mid air, I looked back at Thomas. He had a sly grin and twinkle in his big black eye. I drifted back down and lit on the limb.

"That wasn't very nice, Tom." I said as I settled on the limb.

"Awe, I was just teasing ya little buddy."

"Well, it still wasn't very nice. I'm too tired to play games right now."

"Oh, that's right, you was flying all night. I'm sorry... listen, why don't I go get some more fruit, and I'll come back and keep watch out while you rest. How 'bout that?"

Too tired to argue, I agreed. So Tom T. flew off into the forest and soon returned.

"You go ahead and get some rest, little buddy, and I'll keep a close eye out for any danger."

I closed my eyes and rested, but still listened carefully to the sounds around me. It was not a good rest, but it was rest. Finally about mid day I opened my eyes. There, in front of me, was the big black bird with the enormous yellow beak. And he was sound asleep! I looked around to make sure nothing was slithering or sneaking up on us, and then I looked back at my new friend.

'Some friend, falling asleep while on guard duty...' I said to myself quietly.

Still... he had stayed with me while I tried to rest.

"HEY!" I yelled. I felt the wind from the huge black wings as they flapped furiously to try and keep his enormous body on the limb.

Finally, he regained his position of stability and looked down at me.

"Wha-d ya go and do that for little buddy?" He asked.

"Well, you were asleep, and I opened my eyes, and thought I saw a snake, under your feet!"

"QUWRAK...!"

He screamed out and rose up in flight off of the limb he was on. He looked down, and saw that I was teasing him the way he had teased me.

"Awe, ya got me little buddy. Hey, are ya hungry? I know where some nice flowers are growing, and then I want to show you something special. If you're up to it that is?"

I said that I was indeed very hungry and would enjoy him showing me to some 'nice flowers'. So I followed him through the forest, and indeed he knew his forest well.

We came upon a hill in the middle of his forest. It looked like a hill. But it was like no hill I had ever seen before. It was covered with tangled vines and tiny bell shaped orange flowers. Behind the wall of vines were flat slabs of stone. Some of the slabs had carvings on their surfaces, and some were falling over. This was no ordinary hill with round naturally shaped stones.

"What is this place?" I asked as he ripped some freshly picked fruit apart and began to eat.

"This, my friend, is the land of the lost temples."

"It 'is' very different." I said.

"Yes, it is, isn't it... It was built by men who lived here hundreds and hundreds of years ago. There is even a picture that looks just like me inside one of the rooms." He looked down

at the vine covered temple. "Kind-of makes me famous now, don't it?"

I was not sure what 'famous' meant, but I was beginning to feel the need for nectar gnaw at my tiny tummy.

"I'm going to sample some of those flowers," I said, "if it's alright with you."

"Of course it is little buddy, help yourself. Then when you get your fill, meet me back here and I'll show you a very special place."

The nectar flowed like water from the tiny flowers around that temple, and soon I was feeling much stronger. Tom T. had flown off to find more fruit to eat, but he would always come back to the same tree, to tear into and devour his meal. I finally drank my fill and returned to the tree and waited for his return.

"Feeling better are ya?" Tom asked as he lit on a limb near where I sat.

"Yes... much... thank you."

"Follow me." he said, and dropped out of the tree and began to fly around behind the temple.

We wound through the jungle forest until we came upon a small river almost completely hidden by the trees and vines.

Tom T. turned hard to his right and began to fly along the shaded stream. It twisted and turned, and wound its way along through the thick forest and vines.

I began to hear a distant rumble lingering in the quiet forest. It grew louder the farther up the river we flew. Then a sharp turn back to the left... and I froze...

I was hovering in mid air... Tom lit in a nearby tree... and I was looking at the most breathtaking sight I had ever seen in my life!

In front of me, was a sparkling pool of clear water. Surrounding this pool, were white flowers of all shapes and sizes. There were white flowers cascading from vines... The trees held blossoms of white... and at the far end of the crystal pool, water splashed over rocks and ferns and plunged down into a white foam, riding on the surface.

"It's beautiful!" I shouted above the deafening roar.

I lit in the tree next to Tom.

"I know!" he said as we sat on a limb hanging over the clear water.

The aroma was wonderful.

"I come here just to watch the water fall into the pool."

"It's very peaceful...! and quiet too...! once you get use to the roar of the waterfall!"

He laughed in his 'quarwky' voice... and I laughed too.

It WAS a peaceful place... and beautiful too. All the white flowers around the pool... the mist hanging in the air... the dark green ferns, it all made a most unique oasis in the middle of the forest. Even where the falling water kissed the pool, it bubbled white foam.

We sat watching the hypnotic water, splashing down into the pool, for most of the afternoon. We sat in silence... and were consumed by its beauty. It gave me a lot of peace, sitting there with Tom. Somehow, I knew that I had a friend for life.

Soon the big yellow ball began to turn orange and slip into the trees. It was time to go back to the temples. We both sighed and took one last look for the day... and then we were off.

We flew back down the river and across the forest to where I first met Tom. The shadows drifted across the temples as they had done for hundreds of years. I wondered if my mother had seen this place.

I regretted that I didn't have more time with her. To find out about all the places she had been, and the things that she had seen. I wondered what I would see tomorrow.

I stayed with Tom T. for the next few days, building my strength back. He showed me around his beautiful land of lost temples and told me of the history that had been passed down through all the generations of his family.

I had no history passed down to me. The only history I had was my mother. I knew nothing of her past, or all those that had gone before.

I envied Tom his history.

But he told me... to make 'my own' history. He said I could make each day a special history day. And some day, I would have a lot of history to tell.

It sounded great, and then I began to hear my mothers voice telling me of a 'far far place' and I became restless. I was eager to begin my own history.

"Tom T.," I began one morning, "I have to leave."

I hated to see the hurt look in his eye when I told him. He had been a good friend, a true friend. He would always be my friend, for sharing his world and everything in it with me.

He had even found a carving in one of the temples that looked suspiciously like me. He said that it made me 'famous' too. But this was not the place that I needed to be. I knew it, and he knew it.

"and just when I was getting used to that buzzing noise behind my tail feathers." he joked.

But I could still see the hurt in his eyes.

"Well, if you must, you must." he began, "I do hope you find your 'far far place' Horice. Just remember you are always welcome here... any time."

I hovered for a moment in front of Thomas Thaddeus Toucan...
and then I said...

"Good bye Tom T., and thanks for everything. I will always
remember you. In fact, you're now part of 'MY' history."

He laughed and nodded his head.

"You watch out for them sneaky snakes!"

"You too... Tom!"

And I was off...

Streaking straight up into the blue sky above the green
forest, I said...

"Good bye Tom!"

"Good bye...!" I heard as I shot out over the forest, and
into my history.

Five

The Valley of the Patios

Higher and higher I flew, out over the dark green canopy. There, below me, were the lost temples... and up ahead to my right I saw the tiny river that flowed from the peaceful pool.

I followed the river until I saw the crystal pool, almost completely hidden under the green forest leaves. I decided to follow this river and see where it came from.

It twisted and turned... and wound its way through the forest up into a valley at the base of some very tall mountains. The river grew small under the trees, and I had to fly lower to keep it in sight.

It began to flow in straighter lines as it led me up into the steep hills. I saw more falls, but none compared to the beautiful pool and waterfall that Tom T. had shown me.

Finally, I found where the tiny trickle of water came out of the rocks at the base of the majestic mountains.

On the edge of a flat meadow, high up in the mountains, this little trickle of water slipped in and out from under some rather large rocks. It wound its way back and forth in the flat little meadow, before starting its long racing plunge to the forest below.

I stopped and lit in a nearby tree and watched as the water glided slowly through the flowers before beginning its race. I was hungry!

The trees were quite different up here. They looked hard and much colder than the trees that I was use to.

The flowers were different too. There was nectar, but not much. I made do with what I found. The three mountains, reached up toward the sky, and they looked cold and hard too. This was defiantly not a place for a hummingbird!

The big yellow ball was beginning to change into its orange coat, and it gave every thing in this high meadow an orange hue. I wrestled a few more droplets of nectar before searching for a place to spend the night.

I searched for the warmest spot I could find, and fluffed out my tiny feathers. I missed snuggling next to my mother.

It was a cold night...

It was a miserably cold night.

Even with my feathers bristled, my body shivered. I got very little rest that night. When morning finally came peaking over the top of the mountains, I was ready to go.

I grabbed the few sips of precious nectar that I could, and I was off. Those few sips gave me just enough energy to make it down a pass toward warmer 'hummer friendly' pastures and meadows.

The warmth felt so good to my cold shivering bones. I spent the rest of the morning drinking and warming up. As I continued down out of the high mountains, I found another river and began to follow it. It was wide, and flat, and wound its way into a long peaceful valley.

I continued my journey in this warm valley, and began to see small fields lined with fences, and an occasional house with a red roof. There were cows eating the grass. And some of them were lying down by the river.

I passed over roads of black, and roads of rock that stopped at the little houses with the red roofs. Some of the black roads had yellow lines down the middle that stretched as far as I could see.

I found a big field with row upon row of green plants with small yellow flowers that tasted very sweet! There were light brown balls on the ground, under the leaves of these plants.

Twilight came and I found a tree that sat along one of the fences that surrounded these fields of tiny yellow flowers. It looked like a good place to spend the night.

As I closed my eyes, I remembered how cold I had been in the high meadow up in the mountains. I was glad to be warm. I thought of Tom T. and wondered if he was warm. I thought of my mother.

I spent the whole next day sipping sweet nectar from the little yellow flowers in that field. I would spend another night in the tree by the fence, and tomorrow I would fly on. It was peaceful and quiet here, and I rested well.

I flew most of the next day stopping only briefly for quick sips of sweet energy. Then the flat valley closed in on both sides and became wooded and rocky.

And then, I saw it... building after building... and house after house. They were all lined up on the edge of the black and gray ribbons that snaked along the ground.

I saw a nice quiet looking house on the edge of this maze of stone and steel, so I flew down to find a nice place to rest for the night.

There was a clean patio in front of this house with the rolling red roof. So I lit in a small tree with light green fruit hanging from its branches. I had never seen a tree like this before.

As I looked around the patio at the flowers lined in the boxes on each side, I noticed a large dome of wire. Inside I saw a blue bird sitting on a stick. How strange I thought. I wonder how he got tuck inside that dome of wire.

Across the patio, I noticed a large red ball hanging from a limb. I liked red. I noticed that it had little yellow flowers

on the bottom. I wondered what kind of plant it was. I had never seen a plant with such perfect yellow flowers before.

I flew over to investigate. I hovered in front of the big red ball, looking at the flowers. But they weren't flowers at all. I could smell something sweet but it didn't exactly smell like nectar.

I ducked... as something buzzed swiftly by my head. I turned and faced another hummer coming directly at me. I shot straight up and then to the left... and then I dove in a long arch across the patio. I flew up to a high branch in the tree above the red ball.

"What are you doing at MY feeder?!" demanded the hummer in a gruff tone.

"Oh... I'm sorry. I didn't know that... I didn't know what it was." I said.

"What it was? What it WAS?! You didn't know what it was? Have you never been to the city before, or are you just stupid?" he said in a raspy voice.

"Uh... I guess... This is my first time!"

I didn't know exactly what to say.

"First time...? First time in the city...? Well... why didn't ya say so!" his mood changed dramatically.

"This is called a feeder. And it's full of sweet liquid. It's not nectar, but the people here keep it full, so you never go hungry." He smiled as he looked at the red ball below us.

"They put them out just for us hummers ya know. They like to watch us. Most of our kind, (ya know hummers), are real territorial. So when we find a good feeder or a good field of flowers, we like to think it's ours. If anyone comes along and tries to get a drink, we chase them off. I see you're a ruby throater, come from down south have ya?"

"Yes sir, my name is Horice."

"Oh... right... sorry, I forgot to introduce myself didn't I? I'm William H. Hummer. But you can call me Billy... yepper, 'Billy Blue', that's me! Welcome to the valley of the patios. I was born not far from here ya know, and I know every square inch of this city." he looked around...

"Never gets too cold here, nor too hot either. The people keep the feeders full of the sweet red water most of the time, and there are flowers that bloom at different times all year long. It's really a good place to live." He looked toward the corner of the patio and at the blue bird in the cage.

"Poor Paco..." he said as he watched the blue bird sit on his lonely perch in the cage.

"He doesn't get out much any more. They use to take him out all the time. They cut his wings ya know, so he couldn't

fly off. And then they let him hop around the table and on their shoulders."

I thought how terrible it must be to have your wings cut.

"Oh, they'd feed him regular of course, but he just doesn't get out like he use to. I don't think I would like to live that way. I'm too much of an 'independent' spirit myself. You gonna stick around here for a while, are ya?" he asked looking back at me.

"No, I don't think so." I said, "I'm looking for a 'far far place' in the north country."

"Well... you're welcome to stay here and share the... OH...! Let me show you how the big red ball works."

So we hovered in front of the big red ball and he showed me how the feeder worked. It was simple really, though it took some getting use to. He called it the 'flower that wasn't a flower.'

There were four of the flowers 'that weren't flowers' around the big red ball. Each had a small hole where the sweet liquid waited to be consumed. It just didn't taste like real nectar. It wasn't as satisfying. But there was lots of it!

I spent the night with Billy Blue, as he called himself, on that pleasant patio. Occasionally, I would gaze across the stone patio at Paco, and wonder how he got trapped in a cage like that.

I was glad that I wasn't in a cage.

It was hard to sleep that night because the lights around the patio were so bright.

In fact, there were lights all over the city, as far as I could see. No... this was not the place that I was looking for. I would leave in the morning.

"I'll fly with you to the edge of the city." Billy said, "They know me around here, and no one will bother you as long as you're with me."

After a quick sip from his big red ball with the 'flowers that weren't flowers,' we were off.

We flew across the city through tall buildings and around statues. We crossed a river that wound its way through the heart of this maze of stone and steel. Finally, we reached the far edge of the city.

"Thank you Billy... for everything."

"Oh, you are very welcome Horice, and you just come back anytime."

As I flew on out into the valley, I wondered what other strange things I would find on my way to the 'far far place'.

On and on I flew. I crossed black ribbons that led out into the lands beyond the city. I found two great long ribbons of shiny steel that ran in straight lines, side by side. They stretched as far as I could see. The valley had flattened out

again, and there were mountains on each side. So I followed the shiny ribbons of steel.

I passed farms and fields as I flew along this valley, and soon the day was almost done. I watched the yellow ball creep behind the mountains to my left.

I found a place to rest for the night. It was a lovely, peaceful little tree beside the ribbons of steel.

After a few sips from some nearby flowers, I settled in for a good nights rest.

I thought back to all that I had seen and learned these past few days. I thought about Tom... and Billy... and I thought about my mother.

I closed my eyes...

Six

Brush Country Rattler

It was somewhere in the darkness, just before morning, that a blasting noise nearly knocked me from the tree I was in.

I gripped the tiny limb tightly as I watched a bright light screaming down the ribbons of steel toward me. The two ribbons of steel flashed like lightening, as this midnight monster roared by.

I could feel the wind trying to blow me from the tree as it passed by me. I heard the steady 'klack-klack, klack-klack, klack-klack' as the beast rolled on into the night.

Finally, I could no longer hold on to the small branch that held me peacefully through the night. I let go, and flew straight up into the night sky.

I could see the pale light far down the tracks, as the ribbons of steel flashed. And I began to follow. The edge of the black sky began to turn pale and I knew a new day was beginning.

I wondered if I would ever find the 'far far place' that my mother had told me about. Would I recognize it when I did find it?

I took a deep breath. and flew on into the pale morning.
Maybe I was the only one who could answer that question.

I remembered her words, 'You can never be lost. The world is your home, and all the flowers in it are yours to drink from.' That gave me some comfort as I flew on through the damp morning air.

I saw some flowers that looked inviting, so I left my noisy traveling companion and dropped down for a quick sip. For some reason, there were a lot of bees around these flowers. They were NOT in a sharing mood!

Fortunately, there were more flowers than bees, and I got a few quick sips from the unguarded bounty. But they soon found me, and I knew it was time for this thirsty traveler to move on.

I flew on and soon crossed a wide muddy river. As I crossed it, I entered a land of gray brush with tiny purple flowers.

They were very sweet smelling, and filled the air with a thick and daunting aroma. I found some brush with tiny white flowers that dripped with nectar so sweet that it made my head spin with delight. Oh, I liked these!

I spotted a strange plant. It had big flat slabs of green that were covered with thorns. The huge flowers on this plant looked like they might have some interesting nectar, so I flew in close to check out this strange plant.

'TAK-A-TAK-A-TAK-A-TAK-A-TAK-A-TAK-A!'

I heard a loud rattling noise, and saw a blur streaking toward me! I shot straight up just out of reach of the fangs that lunged toward me. I hovered, and watched as this brown snake with the black diamond shapes recoiled, and prepared for another attack.

As I hovered there, just out of reach of this snakes fangs, I grew angry.

I grew angry... at being attacked while I was minding my own business.

I grew angry... at being attacked while resting in a tree by the ribbons of steel.

I grew angry... at having my home destroyed... and my mother taken from me.

I was full... of all the rage that had been slowly building inside me. It surfaced and burst forth!

I lunged at the rattling monster. My beak darted forward like a piercing arrow. He also lunged at me! But I was fast, and swerved to the right as his gaping mouth flew by.

I swerved again, and pierced his skin with my needle like beak... just behind his amber eye. I hovered, and watched as he coiled again. And just as I was ready to dart at him again, he began to retreat back under the spiny plant and into a hole in the ground.

Now I had never attacked anything before, but it felt good to stand against this monster and claim what was rightfully mine. Freedom...! MY freedom...! to drink the nectar that the world offered to me.

It was my birth right! And no 'sneaky snake' was going to take that away from me!

The heavy aroma of the flowers surrounded me once again. I went back to the free flowing nectar of the tiny white flowers, that gave me such pleasure.

I especially liked these white flowers, they were so sweet, that my head would spin from the taste. I drew large gulps of the stuff, and felt my head whirl.

I continued steadily northward looking for my 'far far place'. Would I know it when I saw it? Would I fly right past it and never even see it? Had I already passed it?

There were just too many questions that I could not answer this early in the day. I would drink some more of this delicious nectar, and continue my journey northward.

Occasionally, during my flight north, I would see a house standing alone in the sea of brush and trees, and I would investigate. Some had the red balls that had 'flowers that weren't flowers,' and some did not.

The brush gave way to more and more trees, and then, to open fields and pastures. Some of the fields had long rows of

green plants with small yellow flowers, and some sort of green balls among the leaves.

As I continued steadily along, I saw great fields of grasses, with cattle lazily eating, or lying under big trees. There were so many new and exciting things to see.

As the great yellow ball in the sky began to turn to orange I saw a city. It was like the city of the patios, but much larger. I stopped near a field of flowers and looked at this huge sea of stone and steel in the distance. I would rest here tonight, and would cross this great city and continue my quest tomorrow.

I found a nice quiet tree by a green river. I was just far enough from the city, that I couldn't hear the constant noise.

But I could feel the vibrations in the air, the constant heart beat of this city.

The big orange ball slipped below the trees.

I closed my eyes.

Seven

City of the River Walk

Morning came early with noisy machines buzzing along the black and gray ribbons that wound their way into the city.

I dropped down into a field near the river for a quick sip of nectar before starting the long journey across this sea of black ribbons, steel, and stone.

I flew toward the towering mountains of stone that leaped up at the sky. The mountains of the high meadow were cold, but these mountains of stone and steel rippled with heat and flashed brightly in the morning light.

I had only flown for a short time, but was already growing tired of the jungle of black and gray ribbons that laced the city together.

I saw a green meadow and a river winding through the towering buildings. So I dropped down, to have a look and a rest.

The river was covered with tall trees and plants. On each side of the waters edge, there were flat stones... and glass windows... and benches... and people. Lots of people!

It was like the patio where Billy lived, except much noisier. I lit on one of the limbs that stretched out over the river, and took a deep breath.

This was 'NOT' the peaceful setting I was use to. It had not been a long flight, but I felt tired and exhausted just the same.

There was a steady roar and rumble, that penetrated everything around me. At least it was cool under the trees by the river.

I saw people walking along the flat stone. Some were alone, some were in groups, and some walked hand in hand. Some of them sat at tables with red and white checked tops. And some, walked over the great stone arches that went from one side of the river to the other.

It was a very busy place!

With a crackling flutter and a muffled cooing, a rather plump bird lit on the limb beside me and looked pleasantly around.

"Welcome to the San Antonio River Walk!" she cooed, "I'm Penelope Pigeon... and you are...?"

"Err... hi... I'm Horacio Hummingbird."

"Well, it's nice to make your acquaintance Mister Hummingbird."

She looked around at the busy river walk below, and straightened one of her feathers.

"Are you enjoying the river walk this lovely morning?" she cooed.

"Uh, yes... I guess so?!" I said as I looked down at all the people walking up and down the stone walkway.

"I've never seen so many people before."

"Ah... yes, well there are quite a few aren't there. But they can be quite pleasant and helpful." she cooed, "Watch!"

She flew down to the flat stone near one of the red and white checked tables and began to walk around in circles.

One of the people sitting at the table threw something to the ground beside Penelope. She quickly walked over and snatched it up, and flew back to the limb that I was on.

"What is that?" I asked.

"This is bread! You'll never go hungry here Mister Hummingbird."

She began to tear and eat the bread she held with one of her feet.

"Uh, I don't eat... uh..."

"Bread... bread, Mister Hummingbird... it's bread! And yes... yes of course you don't eat bread. I know that! But as you can see, there are flowers up and down the river. And I know places

here, where the flowers bloom year around. It's a lovely place to live, and you will never grow hungry here."

"Yes, I'm sure it's a lovely place, but this is not the place that I'm looking for."

"Not to worry Mister Hummingbird, San Antonio will always be here. It's been here for hundreds and hundreds of years. And it will be here if you should decide to come back." she finished her bread.

"Can you stay long enough for me to show you around the city?" she asked.

I thought for a moment. Suddenly I felt like I could stay for a while. This was my big adventure, my history in the making!

"Yes! Yes of course, I would love to see your beautiful city."

"Then we're off, Mister Hummingbird!"

With a kick off the limb, she dropped out of the tree and plunged toward the water. She spread her wings wide, and glided gracefully down the river.

I dove after her, and arched my back just above the shimmering water. Down the winding water we flew. Twisting and turning with each bend of the river. Then up through the streets and across a courtyard with statues and flags.

We flew between buildings that were so close that all I could see was the ribbon of black below and a ribbon of blue above.

She showed me parks and huge gardens, and a waterfall! A waterfall, I thought, in the middle of a city! Ridiculous! Amazing!

It didn't come from the mountains like the one that Tom T. had shown me. It came from stone and steel that men had built. But, it was still a waterfall! And there were ponds with huge gold and orange fish. And flowers, there were lots and lots of flowers.

I spent the night back down by the river where I first met Penelope. The lights were so bright that it was hard for me to sleep. The constant hum of strange noises lasted all night. But, I felt fairly safe beside my new friend.

Once every year, Penelope told me, the people put up many more lights. They put up red ones, and green ones, and blue ones and gold.

They shoot stars up into the sky that explode and cascade down in a million tiny embers! They laugh and dance and play music! It made me tired just listening to her talk about her great city.

Actually, I don't think I got any sleep at all that night.

But I tried...

Eight

A Far Far Place

It had been a lovely place, this San Antonio of the River Walk.

But it was not the 'far far place' I was seeking. I thanked Penelope Pigeon for her hospitality, and was again flying in a northward direction toward my unseen destination.

As I left that huge city of tangled webs of gray, I found a land choked with cedar trees and barren rock. This was a hard place with very few flowers, and an abundance of the pungent smelling cedar.

I decided to fly toward the rising yellow ball, and to try and find some more flowers to satisfy my growing thirst.

I crossed a green river and saw people floating on black rings in the water. Oh, I HAD to check this out!

It was quite cool by the waters edge, and there were flowers there too. The river splashed over rocks and into swirling pools of green. The people in their black rings splashed in the water, and drifted with the gentle flow.

I found some vines with succulent tiny orange flowers. Oh, I really liked these! They were very good to taste after the cedar and barren rocks left a bitter, dry taste in my mouth.

It was nice to get out of the heat for a while, but this was not the place that I was searching for. I knew it, so I flew on. I was flying away from the hot yellow ball as it raced toward the land of rock and cedar.

Soon, I began to see great green pastures and fields again. I crossed a huge gray ribbon that stretched along the ground as far as I could see.

It was busy with fast moving cars that looked like tiny bugs. They reminded me of the ants I had seen in the jungle, scurrying along the vines near my home.

I missed my home, and the companionship of my mother.

As I flew along, I wondered if I would ever see her again? I wondered if I would ever be able to tell her how grateful I was for all the things that she had shown me? I wondered if I would ever find my 'far far place'?

I spotted a field with row after row of green plants with tiny yellow flowers. I knew these flowers! So I decided to take a much needed rest and suck down some more sweet nectar!

It had been a busy day, and I was looking forward to some much needed quiet time and sweet nectar. So, I stopped my quest, and lingered in the field for the rest of the afternoon.

It was an uneventful night, unless my dream would be called an event! I dreamed of a great yellow monster falling down into

the splashing water of a crystal pool. It grabbed wildly at me and tried to drag me down into the waiting mouth of the pool.

But the pool closed around the yellow monster, and the monster was gone. With crystal eyes, the shimmering pool looked at me and smiled.

I woke with a start! The yellow ball was already beginning to rise above the field in front of me. I looked around, and all was quiet.

The crisp morning was pulling me toward the rising yellow ball. It was pulling me on into the unknown. I don't know why, but I trusted my feelings. After a few quick sips of dew mingled nectar, I headed toward the big yellow ball.

I passed more planted fields and pastures with cows and horses and a river that came and faded behind me. I flew over a field with white puffy balls on the green plants. I passed more ribbons of gray on the ground. Another green river came and faded behind me as I flew toward the yellow ball.

Over a hill and into a valley I flew. Dark circles of green grass lay at the end of long ribbons of turf dotted with pockets of clean sand. I saw men hitting little white balls along the ground and into the sand.

There was a large white pool of clear water, where people jumped and splashed. I wondered if they could see me as easily as I could see them.

Soon, I was past this busy place and back over calm, peaceful woods and fields. I stopped for some much needed nectar. A recharge that I found almost every place I had been.

My mother was right. This world WAS my home, and I drank from all the flowers that were in it (with the exception of the bees of course). But they couldn't hoard EVERY flower!

I laughed to myself.

More fields and pastures passed and I saw horses running and kicking wildly in the air. They looked like they were having fun as I zoomed past them.

I crested a small red hill and saw a most beautiful little valley in front of me. As I flew along looking at this quiet valley, I saw something growing larger in front of me.

It was a large hawk! And in one of its great clawed feet it held a squirrel! She was limp and dangling just below the hawk as he soared toward me.

Anger rose inside of me again! As the hawk neared, I darted at his cream colored chest!

He swerved hard to his left trying desperately to hold on to the helpless victim in his grip. I looped high and over his back and darted at him again.

As he dodged my second attack, he released the squirrel and dove down between the trees. I watched as the squirrel fell helplessly toward the waiting arms of the trees below.

I turned to chase the fleeing hawk. I knew that he could not begin to match my agility. He might be able to out run me, but he could not out maneuver me!

I let him go on his way, and I flew back to find the victim that he had dropped. I searched and searched through the trees, but I could not find her.

I hovered for a moment and looked back at the vanishing hawk. Why, I wondered must the strong pick on the weak? It just didn't seem fair.

I flew on.

Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw it!

There was the place I had been searching for! The 'far far place'! I knew it the moment I saw it.

It was beautiful. It was perfect!

I flew high into the evening sky and took in the full view of the place that I had been searching for so long.

There were trees and pastures and fields and flowers and rows of green plants with the tiny yellow flowers. It felt like coming home. Home to a place I had never been before.

As the yellow ball slipped into its orange gown, I thought of all the places that I had been. I had seen many wonders. None of that seemed to matter now. I had found the place that my heart was looking for.

Of all the places that I had seen, none had given me this feeling flowing through my tiny body.

As I hovered high in the evening sky, I looked at the thousands of flowers that were below me. Red, yellow, orange and blue dotted the ground. I had never seen blue flowers before, but there they were.

There was such variety! The mixture of trees and flowers, fields and pastures, made me think that I would never run out of things to see and places to explore.

The cows that were grazing in the pasture, looked contented. The horses grazing in another pasture, looked contented. I felt contented. I flew toward the small farmhouse to see what was there.

I lit in a large tree with three trunks near the house. There was a small garden with a fence that connected to the back of the house. A huge oak stood majestically in front of the house on the other side of a rocky road.

I had never seen a tree quite like this oak. It grew at an angle out of the ground. It looked as if it had fought with some monster that had knocked it over, but not down. It survived and lived and grew into an old, old tree. Its branches drifted out into a huge circle and touched the ground on almost all sides.

I sighed and closed my eyes just before the orange ball slipped behind the 'far far' trees.

I was exhausted.

I was contented.

I dreamed of white flowers and waterfalls... and of big red balls with sweet nectar. I dreamed of rows and rows of tiny yellow flowers with sweet nectar dripping on the ground.

I woke to the sound of a door banging shut. A man walked across the open ground shaking something in his hand. It made a rattling noise, much like the brown snake that attacked me.

He walked through a gate in the fence and began to throw yellow nuggets onto the ground. I saw the deer cautiously step from behind brush and trees and began to approach the farmer. The farmer spoke softly to them, and then, he turned and walked back to his house.

I watched the deer eat the golden nuggets that lay across the ground. They pawed and chased each other, and jumped sideways from time to time. They were funny to watch. But there was exploring to be done! And 'I' must do it!

I flew out of the tree that I had spent the night in, and across the field behind the farmhouse. This field contained the same tiny yellow flowers that I knew so well. Row after row... there were so many! I dropped down for a quick snack before continuing my adventure.

Back up into the fresh air of the morning I zoomed, and flew in a big loop.

I was so happy!

I crossed a small pond where cattle were drinkng. I flew up toward the sandy hillside at the edge of the field.

There was a small creek at the edge of these hills, so I followed it as it wound its way along the edge of the farm. I found a tiny spring where the water seeped from the ground beneath the hills.

There was a small meadow with flowers near the spring. It was just full of beautiful flowers, hidden there among the trees and ravines.

I was so happy!

I had everything I needed.

I was so happy...

Nine

Sidney Squirrel

I had been at my 'far far place' for several days now, and had settled in nicely.

I was heading for my daily run down the tree-covered lane along the south fence. I would start at one end and drop down and fly as fast as I could through the tunnel of trees just above the lane.

When I reached the end of the tunnel, I would loop high into the air and go back through it again! It was great fun. What a great place this was!

This day however, something caught my eye. I saw a squirrel curled up in a nest high up in a tree along the fence.

I had never noticed this before. Why was he sleeping so late in the morning? I wondered if he was still breathing.

My curiosity got the better of me, so I dropped down to check him out.

I buzzed the nest once, very fast, and flew high above the tree and looked down as I hovered. I saw movement. So, he was alive!

I dropped down and lit on the edge of the nest. He knocked the leaves from his face and sat up in the nest.

"It's kind of late to be waking up, isn't it?" I said as he cocked his head and looked at me.

"What are you?" he asked looking bewildered.

"I'm a hummingbird of course." I said, stating the obvious.

"My name is Horacio Hummingbird, but you can call me Horice. And you are?"

"Uh... I'm Sidney... Sidney Squirrel."

"Shouldn't you be up running and jumping through the trees and enjoying the day?" I asked him.

He just stared at me.

"Why are you still in bed? You didn't answer me."

"I haven't been feeling very well, lately." he said.

Then, he began to tell me how a hawk had carried off his mother. I listened intently and thought about how my own mother had disappeared. I found it strange that the two of us, from different parts of the world, had experienced almost the same thing.

"Terrible story... terrible loss." I said.

"I remember flying back to my home after a glorious day sipping nectar in the valley to find a bright green snake coiled around our nest."

"Well, I stopped in mid air. Did I tell you that I could hover in mid air? Any way, I watched him... Oh, did I tell you that I can fly backwards? Well... I watched that snake for a long

time and then I lit on a branch and waited for my mother." I took a breath.

"But she never came home. So naturally, I can only assume that the retched snake got my mother." He looked down and shook his head after I spoke.

I suddenly felt that someone understood my loss. I found someone, it appeared, that shared a similar loss.

"I'm sorry Horice..."

"Thank you Sidney..." I sighed.

"OK, I'm off, so many flowers, and so little time." I laughed.

I flew into the air and was off to find delicious nectars.

"Bye...!" I heard him shout as I flew toward the farmhouse. I looped back to the lane. I just couldn't resist. I flew through the tunnel one more time!

Out the other end and banking hard to the right, I zipped down the fence toward the farm house across the little dry creek.

I had discovered some nicely flavored tiny red bell shaped flowers on long stalks, under the hack-berry tree by the back of the farm house. That is where I was heading.

As I flew under the tree behind the farm house, I saw the farmer sitting in a white chair like the ones I had seen on the river walk. He held something in his lap, and was making marks on it.

I hovered for a moment and looked at him.

He looked over at me and began to say something. I couldn't understand his words, but they sounded calm... peaceful and reassuring.

I flew down and took a few sips from the red bell shaped flowers. Then, I zoomed away to the tiny yellow flowers in the field. There were so many of them! I couldn't possibly go hungry here.

I drank my fill and headed back to the farmhouse for a rest. The farmer was gone, so I took a few sips from the red bell shaped flowers. I was so full, I couldn't drink any more.

After my short nap, I headed up the creek and found Sidney climbing through the trees.

"Hi Horice..." he said.

"Hello Sidney... Feeling a little bit better are you?" I asked as I hovered in front of him.

"Yes I am." he said, "and thanks for talking to me about your mom. I was pretty sad about my mom... and listening to you helped. But I'm not sure that she told me everything that I need to know."

"Well... I wouldn't worry too much about it. I'm sure that when the time comes, you will know what to do."

"I sure hope so, Horice."

"Well... I'm off again... see you later."

"Bye...!" I heard him say as I flew off to do more exploring.

I flew up the creek to check on the spring and the little meadow. My mom had a favorite meadow, and this one was fast becoming mine.

The day grew still and the big yellow ball turned to orange, so I headed back to the farm house and the big hack-berry tree. I was prepared for a quick snack from those little red bell shaped flowers, but when I got to the back of the farm house I got a surprise.

The farmer had hung a big red ball, with 'flowers that weren't flowers' under the tree that I stayed in.

What a kind and considerate thing to do I thought to myself. I filled myself with the sweet liquid the farmer offered and then took a few sips from the red bell flowers. I flew up to the top of the hack-berry tree to rest for the night.

How totally wonderful I felt.

I was a very contented hummer.

I dreamed that night. I dreamed of big yellow flowers with nectar flowing like the waterfall near Tom's temple. I dreamed of big red bell shaped flowers dancing in the wind.

I slept well that night.

Ten Heather

I woke with a jolt.

I opened my eyes in the dark still morning and heard a rumbling roar. I saw white and yellow and red lights moving along the lane on the south side of the farm close to where Sidney lived.

I ruffled my feathers and listened to the roar and popping of the gravel. I tried to close my eyes. It was no good. There was just too much noise!

The popping stopped and I opened one eye and saw the sky begin to turn pale above the sandy hills. I could just barely make out the trees and the little dry creek, so I thought I would fly over and pay a visit to Sidney.

Surly he was awake. With all the lights and noise near his nest, how could he sleep?!

I crossed the creek I found Sidney awake and looking down into the lane. I landed near the edge of his nest.

"Good morning Horice." he said without looking around.

I hovered to a halt on the nearest limb.

"And a lovely morning to you too Sidney...!" I said looking down the opening beside the fence where the big yellow monster sat puffing black smoke.

"What is it Horice?" he asked as we looked at the monster.

"It is a terrible machine that men use to destroy trees. It's called a bulldozer. I saw one come through the forest where I was born. It pushed my home down and left nothing but bare ground in its path. They make the ground tremble, and when they pass, nothing is left standing... not a living thing... Nothing can stand against a bulldozer!"

"A bulldozer?!" he repeated, "Why would the farmer bring one here?"

"I don't know Sidney. But it knocks down trees that have stood a lifetime, in a matter of minutes."

"Do you think it will knock down my tree Horice?" he asked.

"I don't know Sidney, but I don't want to watch. I'll see you later."

I heard him say 'Goodbye...!' as I flew off up the creek to my special private little meadow by the spring.

I wanted to get as far away from that yellow monster as I could. I flew up along the tangled vines and trees until I could no longer hear the distant rumbling of the monster.

I flew down to my little meadow to have a morning sip and relax. Seeing the yellow monster had brought back some very bad memories.

I wondered why the farmer would bring this terrible monster here to ravage and destroy this beautiful place.

I grew mad thinking about how a big yellow monster like this one had come through the jungle, destroying everything in its path. It destroyed my home in the jungle, and now...! I shook my head.

This was MY home now! And if I had to fight for it, I would! I would fight the yellow monster. But how...? It was really... really big!

I shot straight up into the air away from that peaceful meadow in the hills, determined to fight the monster. I was as mad as I had ever been as I flew along the creek toward the yellow monster!

I zipped along the creek heading back to face my enemy. But as I flew, I realized that I couldn't win against the machine.

So, I turned toward the field with the rows of yellow flowers. I had been so happy. I didn't understand why the farmer would do such a thing. He seemed like a good man. He even put the big red ball with 'flowers that weren't flowers' out for me in the hack-berry tree by his house.

I decided to visit the farm house and find the farmer and show him how unhappy I was. I would buzz him until I made him understand!

I felt that familiar pain in my stomach. I would drink from the red ball that had 'flowers that weren't flowers' first... THEN I would find the farmer!

He had made a terrible mistake bringing that monster here. I would 'MAKE...!' him understand.

As I flew toward the tree by the back of the house, I saw something...

It was my MOTHER! IT WAS MY MOTHER AT THE FEEDER!

"MOTHER...!" I yelled as I darted toward her.

She shot upward and away from the feeder as I rocketed toward her.

"MOTHER...!" I yelled again as I closed in on her.

She swerved and looped up and began to charge at me! As I ducked, and looped back on her, I realized that this was NOT my mother!

She turned, and was charging again.

"WAIT...!" I yelled as I ducked and swerved out of her way.

She hovered for a moment and then buzzed back toward the tree by the farm house. I followed and lit on a limb across from her.

"Are you always this rude so early in the morning?!" she demanded.

"No, wait... I'm sorry... It's just..." I stammered.

"Just what?!" she snapped.

"I'm sorry... it's just..." I tried to get the words out,

"I'm sorry... let's start over." I finally said something that made sense... I thought.

"Start over?!" she shouted, "You want to attack me again?! Well good luck! I'm a pretty good fly-er too...!"

"No... no, no... " I said, "I'm sorry..."

"Sorry?!" she cocked her head at me.

"Sorry...?! Sorry... Again...?" she snapped.

She was really mad at me now.

"Sorry...? Sorry for attacking me while I was minding my own business...? Sorry for interrupting me while I was having my first drink from that feeder...?"

She glared at me.

"Look... I'm sorry... " I began but she cut me off.

"Again you're sorry! I... Wait..."

She stopped and looked at me and cocked her head again.

"Oh, no...!" she cocked her head the other way still staring at me.

"Oh, no... no... no...! It's me...! I'm so sorry. I didn't realize that your vocabulary was so limited! No... no. Oh 'I...!' am so sorry... I... I w-i-l-l s-p-e-a-k t-o y-o-u s-l-o-w-l-y s-o

y-o-u c-a-n u-n-d-e-r-s-t-a-n-d m-e...!" she cocked her head back the other way and glared at me... again.

I downed my head... closed my eyes... and took a breath. I shook my head back and forth in frustration. I was beaten!

"Look, I'm..." I hesitated, "Look... I thought you were someone else."

"Oh...! He does know other words...!"

I shook my head again in disbelief.

"I..." why was I having so much trouble talking to her?! I had never had trouble talking before!

"Can we start over?" I finally said.

"Start over? You want to attack me again?" she snipped.

"No... no, no... I... Look... my name is Horice. Well, my real name is Horacio, but I... just Horice." I gave up. Beaten... frustrated... humbled...

She looked away from me for the first time. She looked at the bright red cardinal chirping on a limb above us. She fluffed and straightened her feathers.

I waited...

She fluffed again and turned back and looked me squarely in the face.

"I'm Heather..." she finally said, "Heather Hummer."

Her eyes softened slightly as she looked at me.

"I'm Horice." I said, relieved that we were talking.

"Yes, you said."

Though I didn't know it at the time, this was the beginning of a conversation that would last a lifetime.

We sat in that tree by the farm house above the big red ball and talked the rest of the morning.

She had come from the land of the lost temples and knew 'Tom T.'. What a small world it really was!

"Do you know the place I'm talking about?" I asked.

"Oh, yes." she said, her eyes soft as flowers, "That's the most beautiful place I have ever seen. The pure white flowers, around that crystal clear pool, are so beautiful. That's the first place I'm stopping when I go back this winter."

I had not given any thought about going back. I had found my 'far far place', and I no longer had a home back there in the jungle. But I did have friends there.

Yes... I thought to myself. Why not...? Maybe I would go back. Maybe I would go back with Heather.

I smiled to myself as I sat there listening to her. I smiled as I sat there thinking of the crystal pool, the white flowers, and Heather. I was a contented little hummingbird.

I had completely forgotten about the yellow monster until a particularly loud crack and groan interrupted our conversation.

I told her about Sidney and the monster and asked if she would go with me to check on him. She said that she would be glad to go with me.

We flew over the creek and over the stark ground beneath the monster. It seemed to have stopped its destruction of trees and was staying in just one spot in the middle of the barren ground.

It was digging a deep hole in middle of the barren ground. The monster had pushed all the dirt up on one side of the hole. I wondered what this crazy man was doing.

Sidney was not in his nest, nor did he seem to be anywhere around.

"Hey... you want to see a quiet meadow up the creek?" I asked Heather as we hovered above Sidney's nest.

"Sure..." she said. The softness in her eyes made me feel weak. I needed some nectar... quickly!

So, off we flew... away from the black smoke and fumes spewing from that great yellow monster.

Up the creek we zipped, through the trees and vines as the little creek wound its way up into the hills.

Finally, we were there.

The tiny pool of water seeping from the sandy banks seemed well hidden from the rest of the world. And near by, was my favorite meadow.

The flowers in that private little meadow seemed made for two. There was enough nectar for both of us to drink our fill.

In the days that followed, we had great fun flying around the farm.

We flew in formation. We zigzagged across each others path. We looped high in the air, coming back down... heading straight for one another. At the last possible second, we would swerve to miss each other... just touching feathers...

She was great fun... and I was in heaven!

I smiled...

Eleven

Across the Great Water

We took many trips up the creek to our private little meadow by the seeping spring during the rest of that hot summer.

The rest of our time was spent near the farm house and the red ball with 'flowers that weren't flowers.' The farmer was faithful and kept the ball full of sweet red liquid.

Many of the flowers in the fields and pastures had vanished in the sweltering heat. The flowers in our private meadow had also withered, and the spring was now dry and parched. The moss and ferns had turned brown and were trying to hide from the heat.

One day, as we were sitting in the tree by the farm house, something splattered on the limb beside me. I had almost been asleep... in the still heat of the day... when another big drop came crashing through the leaves and limbs, and exploded beside me!

I looked up into a sky turning gray, and felt a cool breeze waif through the tree. I moved closer to Heather and fluffed my feathers. The water began to slap the leaves on its way to the ground.

"I think we should start thinking of leaving soon." she said through the noise of the clattering rain.

I had been so content with Heather by my side all summer, that I had forgotten completely about returning to the land in the south. Soon it would be turning cold here, and even though the farmer kept plenty of the sweet red liquid for us... it would not be enough.

After the rain stopped, I told Heather that I wanted to check on Sidney... and tell him that I would be leaving. She said 'that was ok' with her... but she would stay there and rest.

I left Heather in the tree by the farm house and flew up and over the creek toward Sidney's nest. The little creek that was normally dry was full of rushing brown water.

Sidney was not in his nest. I flew up and down the lane and the little creek looking for him. But I couldn't find him anywhere.

As I flew back and forth looking for Sidney, I realized the hole that the yellow monster dug was filling with water. This was most interesting!

I had seen ponds of water before, but had never thought about how they were created. As I hovered above the pond, I thought about how I had been angry at the farmer.

I was wrong! He had used this monster to create a beautiful pond that would provide water to all the creatures that lived here.

I flew back toward Heather. I couldn't believe that I couldn't find Sidney. I remembered the hawk and wondered if I would ever see Sidney again.

"Is he alright...?" she asked as I lit on the limb beside her.

"I don't know... I couldn't find him."

Then I realized something...

"I never introduced you to him. I never told him about you!"

I was disgusted with myself.

"I didn't know if you wanted your friend to meet me..." she said with a soft smile.

"Of course I want him to meet you! I just forgot all about him. I can't believe I did that!" I shook my head. "It's all your fault, ya know! You made me forget everything but you."

She smiled.

It really wasn't her fault... I knew it... and she knew it.

She hadn't made me do anything. She was just so much fun to be with.

We had looped through the sky... flown side by side down the tunnel of the lane... crisscrossed each others path through the fields and pastures... hovered in mid air, face to face... we had done so many things together.

She filled me with such contentment.

"Well... I guess from now on, I'll just have to remind you of things that you need to do." She suppressed a smile and looked away.

"Tell you what... why don't we spend another day here, and we can look for your friend tomorrow, before we leave."

It was a good idea, and I agreed.

The night went quickly and by mid morning I had given up hope of finding Sidney. So we left our 'far far place' and headed south.

We crossed too many rivers and ribbons of black and gray to count. She seemed to be in a hurry.

Soon, we were looking at green water as far as the eye could see. It was if... the world had ended in front of me!

The water stretched from left... to right... as far as I could see in each direction. I saw houses, and huge buildings, dotted along the sand. The water was snarling, and pounding down on the white sand.

"Follow me!" I heard her say, as she dove toward one of the houses not far from a huge building.

She lit on a wire under the edge of the house. I had never seed such a house. It sat high above the ground on round poles. Then I saw it...! There, hanging from a wire, was a round red ball with 'flowers that weren't flowers.' It was full of sweet red liquid.

"Uh..." I suddenly had an insane thought!

"We're not thinking of flying across that water...? Are we...?"

I looked at Heather.

"Are we...?" I asked her again.

"Yes... Yes we are..." she said as cool as the salty breeze.

"Are you crazy...?!" I said, "There are no flowers out there...!

I doubt that there are any of these red balls full of sweet liquid out there either...!"

She just smiled at me...

"No... there are no flowers, nor sweet liquid... but this is the shortest distance, and the quickest way to get where we're going." she said calmly.

"Well... I'm not in that big a hurry!" I said, shaking my head at the craziness she seemed ready to attempt.

"No... no... I think we should stay over the land. It's safer... and I don't see any place to rest out there." I looked out over the waves of white foam pounding the defeated sand.

"No Horice... there are no places to rest... no flowers... and no red balls with sweet liquid hanging from a wire..."

"But this is the shortest distance... and the quickest way back home. There are things to do... preparations that have to be made. I have already crossed it once, with my mother, on our way north."

She was still looking at me when I pried my eyes from the hypnotic splashing of the water on the sand.

"Look..." she continued, "if you don't want to go with me, then fine. You go the way that you feel the safest. But I have to go this way..."

The look in her soft eyes was the look of determination and desperation. Her eyes pleaded for me to go with her.

I couldn't refuse...

"Ok, ok...! I just hope it doesn't kill me!" I said and chuckled.

"Oh, thank you Horice! Thank you...! I won't let you die." She smiled and stepped closer... and our feathers touched.

"We need to rest, and fill up on nectar and the sweet liquid before we fly across the great water." she said calmly.

I followed her to one of the towering buildings. We found flowers there... in neatly trimmed rows. We sucked all the nectar we could manage to hold from all the flowers we could find.

The big yellow ball turned to orange and began to melt into the ground. We retreated to the thin wire under the house that stood on poles.

"In the morning... we'll suck up all the sweet liquid we can hold. There are no flowers on the great water... and it's a long flight."

She fluffed her feathers and stepped closer.

"Thank you... Horice." she closed her eyes.

I smiled and stepped closer to her. I fluffed my feathers. I could feel her feathers. I liked our feathers to touch.

The breeze was thick with the aroma of the great water, and the steady roar of the white foam lulled me into a deep sleep.

I dreamed of frothy white foam on crystal clear waters... of pungent white flowers... and of Heather... by my side.

"Wake up."

"Horice..."

"Horice...!"

"Horice...!! WAKE UP...!!!"

I almost fell from the wire!

"I let you rest as long as I could. Now, you must drink as much as you can... and drink quickly. We must leave soon."

She had already taken her fill of the sweet liquid. The sky was just turning pale as I finished.

"I'm ready! Lead the way Heather... I'm right on your tail!" I grinned... she smiled... and took flight.

I zipped past her with ease. I circled up into a full loop and came back down at her side.

"Save your strength..." she said, "It's a long flight."

With a heavy sigh, I fell in by her side. We hummed along at a boring pace.

"We could go faster!" I said, hoping to ease the boredom and get across this miserably barren expanse of water as quickly as possible.

She shook her head slightly, but said nothing. So, I sighed again, and resolved to drone along at this monotonous pace.

I began to look for patterns in the water... imagining I was flying over a vast blue-green meadow.

I thought I saw something in the water, and dropped my head to look back as I flew over it. As my beak pointed back between my toes, I began to fall closer to the water. I jerked my head back, and realized I had fallen far below Heathers flight path. I struggled to get back up to her level.

Then, I did see something in the water! Far below the surface, a pale green shadow twisted casually in the cold water.

The big yellow ball was high overhead now... and I began to feel a 'tightness' in my chest. I wondered how far it was across this great blue-green water.

But, I kept my beak tightly shut and droned on.

I had flown all night without stopping once, but it was cool then. The heat and the dampness were draining precious energy minute by minute. The tightness in my chest was growing.

On through the sweltering heat of the afternoon we hummed steadily forward. Heather began to move away from me.

At first I thought she was flying faster. But when I tried to speed up to catch her, I found that I was flying as fast as I could.

As hard as I tried, I couldn't go faster. I wanted to 'scream' out for her to wait... but I couldn't do that either.

She began to slow her flight and was soon at my side.

"Are you alright?" she asked. These were the first words that she had spoken since we started this agonizing flight.

"My chest... hurts... and I... I can't... fly... any faster." I struggled to get the last few words out of my mouth.

"That's ok... just try to relax. You have enough strength to make it. It's not very far now... and then we can rest."

Her words of strength and encouragement floated over me like the white foam floated on the crystal pool we would soon see.

I found strength in her conviction... and I bore the pain through the afternoon.

Suddenly, she saw it!

"Look...! Look Horice...!" she shouted with renewed energy. "We're almost there!"

I couldn't speak. The pain in my chest was almost unbearable now... but I struggled forward. I could barely see a small dark spot on the horizon.

"Don't give up on me now Horice..." she pleaded.

If I could hang on a little longer, I would make it. I had to make it. The burning in my chest grew stronger, and my eyes began to blur...

.

I opened my eyes... to Heather standing over me. She smiled down at me.

"You rest now Horice... We made it."

Her soft words comforted me.

She brought some nectar... and filled my beak with her sweet warm liquid.

I rested on the forest floor...

She watched over me...

I sighed...

Twelve

New Nest, Bright Light

I slept all night and half the morning.

The coolness of the morning had given me back some small amount of strength. To this, I was grateful.

Heather stopped in the forest, just past the shoreline, when I collapsed and fell to the ground. I didn't remember anything except looking up at Heather, just before I closed my eyes.

"Rest, Horice..." she said as the morning light filtered through the trees.

"We'll spend the day here while you get your strength back." She smiled at me.

"Do you want me to bring you some more nectar...?"

"No... I'll follow you. Just don't... fly too fast."

She laughed.

"I promise... I'll fly slow... Just for you."

I was still very sore, but managed to keep up while we searched for flowers.

That evening, we flew back to the edge of the forest where I fell. I still couldn't remember the last few miles before crashing to the ground.

We watched the orange glow fade into the water.

She stepped close to me and fluffed her beautiful feathers. I was still too tired to fluff... too tired to speak... and too tired even... to be hungry.

The familiar pain in my stomach blended with the pain that encased my whole body. Even my feathers hurt! But I could feel her soft feathers touching mine.

I don't remember closing my eyes, or even sleeping, but I do remember...

"Good m-o-r-n-i-n-g..." her soft voice flowed over me like sweet nectar.

I kept my eyes shut... I wanted to drink it in again...

"Good m-o-r-r-r-n-i-n-g...!"

I opened one eye, and there she was... soft eyes glowing in the morning light.

"Hi..." I said, basking in the warmth of her glow.

"Hi..." she said back with a smile as soft as a flower.

"Ready for some sweet jungle juice?" she said softly.

"Yesss..." I whined a little... "Can you bring it to me...?"

"Ha...!" she raised her voice. "You're not hurting that bad!"

She cocked her head and tilted it in my direction. Then, looked me squarely in the face, and with a voice of concern said...

"Are you...?"

"Nooo... " I whined again... "but... if I... could maybe get... just a sip, or two... ?"

"Faker...!" she said flatly and smiled at me.

"Ready...?" she asked and fluffed her wings.

"Yep...!" I said, "I guess so..."

I followed her as she dropped down to the forest floor and buzzed away. The stiffness in my chest and wings soon began to fade.

As I drank from the bounty of the forest, my strength began to return.

Soon we were darting here and zipping there... and occasionally hovering face to face... just smiling! We continued deeper into the forest.

About the middle of the afternoon I recognized some mountains in the distance.

"Is that... Are those... Are we...?" I couldn't seem to complete a sentence.

"Yes it is, and we should be at the lost temples tomorrow."

It was like she was reading my mind.

"And the..." I began...

"Yep!" she grinned at me "We'll go by white falls... first thing."

I grinned back at her and we continued sipping and flitting and zigging and zagging the rest of the afternoon. I sat beside her that night, our feathers touching... my eyes closed. If contentment had a name... it was 'Horice'.

Midway through the next day we reached the falls. It was just as I remembered it, just as it had been... for hundreds... maybe thousands of years. It was to me, the most beautiful place in the world!

We sat side by side for a long time that afternoon, just watching the water and sipping nectar from the pure white flowers. It was perhaps the best day of my life!

"Come..." she shouted over the roar of the falls, "I want to show you something."

I followed her down the river past the lost temples and over a hill to a grove of trees in the middle of a small clearing in the forest. High up in one of the gnarly old trees was a tiny nest.

"So this is your home...?" I asked as I looked it over carefully.

"It 'WAS' my home." she corrected me.

"I want a new nest!" she said looking deeply into my eyes, "A nest we can call 'OUR' home."

Suddenly, it dawned on me what all the rush to get back here was about. There was a reason for our sudden departure, and the nearly disastrous crossing of the great water. It had all been in preparation for building 'OUR' nest.

"We can stay here tonight... and tomorrow..." she hesitated, "I would like to be closer to..."

"The falls...?" I finished for her.

I knew what she was thinking.

"Me too..." I whispered.

She sighed.

"I'm happy Horice... very happy." she smiled.

"Me too..." I said as our wings touched and my eyes closed.

We got an early start the next morning. And soon, we found a tree that we agreed was perfect. It was about midway between the lost temples and the falls. It was perfect!

Now came the work...

I became very busy gathering various bits and pieces for Heather to build her perfect nest. She was very meticulous and had to have it just so.

She rearranged it several times before she was satisfied. Tom T. had seen us, and had come to help. But the huge pieces of twig and limb he brought, just didn't quite fit in with Heathers' plan.

She was ever so polite and tactful, in rejecting Toms' offerings.

Tom T. finally got the message though. He and I resigned ourselves to sit in the nearby branches and watch Heather work her magic.

Finally... Heather was happy.

I was happy.

Tom was happy.

We were 'ALL' happy that Heather was happy!

She settled right into the nest. Then, a few days later the surprise came.

A perfect... tiny... white egg. And then a few days later, another perfect... tiny... white egg. Two perfect... tiny white eggs. This was too good... I had to find Tom T. and tell him the news!

I zoomed through the forest to the lost temples. I looked all around the temples, but couldn't find my big yellow beaked friend any where. Finally, I found him a short distance away, in a valley below the temples.

"TOM! TOM...!" I shouted as I found him picking at a piece of fruit on a long fat limb.

"Tom...! Tom... you'll never guess what!" I was so excited.

"Wha..." he said with his beak half full.

"Go on Tom, guess...!" I was just too excited to contain myself.

"Oh, never mind... Tom...! I'm gonna be a father...!"

I must have been beaming.

"A father, are ya? Well... con-grat-uuu-lations...!"

He was truly happy for me. He had tried to help with the nest, bringing sticks and dried leaves, but they were just too big.

Heather tried to be appreciative, tactfully letting Tom know that she would rather use different materials. She knew exactly what she wanted and how she wanted it. Tom, was understanding in the matter... he had seen moodiness before.

As Heather began to spend more and more time in the nest, I began to bring home extra nectar and share it with her. More and more, I would fly away and sip for me and sip for Heather. The eggs were too important... too perfect... and too beautiful, not to help out.

I was happy to do it. If I could fly across the great water, I could do this!

The days ticked on, and faithful to my new home and family, I worked hard every day. Though tired... if contentment had a name, it was 'Horice'.

I remember it was warm that evening. I sat on the same limb that I sat on every night. Near my nest... near my eggs... and near my Heather.

"I thought I'd join you tonight." she said softly.

"What about the eggs?"

"Oh, they are almost ready... any day now."

The softness in her eyes and voice melted me every time.

"Besides, it's a nice warm night... and I feel like being out here with you."

She moved close to me... our feathers touched... and I closed my tired eyes. I took a deep breath and let it out slowly...

We sat there in the pale glow of golden light for a long time... feathers touching. The gentle wind had died down, till not a leaf quivered.

.

Heathers eyes flew open and she turned...!

There, in the pale light, two yellow eyes lunged. They struck. She had already begun to turn for her attack when she saw Horice in its mouth!

The surge of rage was tremendous! Her lance pointed beak struck the pale green monster just behind its yellow eye. But he only recoiled with Horice still in his mouth.

She struck again, piercing his neck with her dagger like beak. He released his victim and Horice fell to the forest floor. But Heather was not through!

As the viper struck at her, she laughed at his pathetic lunge. She slipped sideways and looped up and over behind the snakes head and thrust her dagger deep into the base of his skull...

She found the tiny spot that led to his brain. She felt the quiver... as she connected! She released him, and he fell to the forest floor beside Horice.

Heather dropped like a shot to the forest floor. She lit beside Horice... She looked at him closely... He was still breathing... though just barely. She spread her tiny wing over his mangled body... and touched his beak with hers.

She sighed...

.

.

.

I heard a buzzing sound...

.

"Horice...!"

.

The sound echoed in my brain... I closed my eyes.

.

The buzzing sound echoed again... and then it grew fainter.

My body screamed... but I couldn't move. It yearned to stretch... and so I pushed as hard as I could. I pushed... against the darkness that surrounded me.

I pushed again... harder this time.

There was a loud CRACK!

.

A bright light penetrated the darkness...

I slowly opened my eyes and looked up...

up into the face of my mother...

Her name was...

Heather.

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