

Armadillo's Song

A Bolivian Legend

There once lived an armadillo who loved music more than anything else in the world. After every rainfall, the armadillo would drag his shell over to the large pond filled with frogs and he would listen to the big green frogs singing back and forth, back and forth to each other in the most amazing voices.

"Oh," thought the armadillo, "Oh how I wish I could sing."

The armadillo would creep to the edge of the water and watch the frogs leaping and swimming in a frantic green ballet, and they would call back and forth, back and forth in beautiful, musical tones. He loved to listen to the music they made as they spoke, though he didn't understand their words; which was just as well - for the frogs were laughing at this funny animal that wanted so badly to sing like a frog.

"Don't be ridiculous," sang the frogs as they played. "Armadillos can't sing."

Then one day a family of crickets moved into a new house near the armadillo, and he was amazed to hear them chirp and sing as merrily as the frogs. He would creep next to their house and listen and listen all day, all night for their musical sounds.

"Oh," sighed the armadillo, "Oh how I wish I could sing."

"Don't be ridiculous," sang the crickets in their dulcet tones. "Armadillos can't sing."

But the armadillo could not understand their language, and so he just sighed with longing and listened to their beautiful voices laughing at him.

Then one day a man came down the road carrying a cage full of canaries. They were chirping and fluttering and singing songs that were more beautiful even than those of the crickets and the frogs. The armadillo was entranced. He followed the man with the cage down the road as fast as his little legs would carry him, listening to the canaries singing.

"Oh," gasped the armadillo, "Oh how I wish I could sing."

Inside the cage, the canaries twittered and giggled.

"Don't be ridiculous," sang the canaries as they flapped about. "Armadillos can't sing."

The poor tired armadillo couldn't keep up with the man and the cage, and finally he fell exhausted at the door of the great wizard who lived in the area. Realizing where he was, the armadillo decided to beg a boon of the man.

Timidly, the armadillo approached the wizard, who was sitting in front of his house and said: "Great wizard, it is my deepest desire to learn to sing like the frogs and the crickets and the canaries."

The wizard's lips twitched a little in amusement, for who had ever heard of an armadillo that could sing. But he realized that the little animal was serious. He bent low to the ground and looked the creature in the eye.

"I can make you sing, little armadillo," he said. "But you do not want to pay the price, for it will mean your death."

"You mean if I die I will be able to sing?" asked the armadillo in amazement.

"Yes, this is so," said the wizard.

"Then I want to die right now!" said the armadillo. "I would do anything to be able to sing!"

The wizard and the armadillo discussed the matter for many hours, for the wizard was reluctant to take the life of such a fine armadillo. But the creature insisted, and

so the wizard finally killed the armadillo, made a wonderful musical instrument from his shell, and gave it to the finest musician in the town to play.

Sometimes the musician would play his instrument by the pond where the frogs lived, and they would stare at him with big eyes and say: "Ai! Ai! The armadillo has learned to sing."

Sometimes the musician would play his instrument by the house where the crickets lived, and they would creep outside to stare at him with big eyes and say: "Ai! Ai! The armadillo has learned to sing."

And often the musician would visit the home of his friend who owned the cage full of canaries - who was also a musician - and the two men would play their instruments together while the little birds watched with fluttering wings and twittered in amazement: "Ai! Ai! The armadillo has learned to sing."

And so it was. The armadillo had learned to sing at last, and his voice was the finest in the land. But like the very best musicians in the world, the armadillo sacrificed his Life for his Art.

The Blue Rocks

A Massachusetts Ghost Story

The story was told furtively, in lowered voices. Buried treasure. Near the blue rock. A long time ago, an unknown ship dropped anchor in the surf near Wasque Bluff. A small boat carrying a mysterious figure, six sailors, and a large box landed on the beach. The sailors dug a deep hole inland near the blue rock, and the box was lowered into it. As the sailors stepped back, their leader threw a small green package onto the box. With a huge crash and a flash of blinding green light, the hole disappeared! The silent group walked back to the boat, leaving behind scorched, blackened earth.

After hearing several whispered versions of the story, two adventurers decided to have a go at the treasure. They would meet at the rock at midnight. The first chap arrived early. Tired out from his long walk, he leaned against the large stone and closed his eyes. A sound from the waters jerked him awake. Turning around, the treasure hunter could just make out the lines of a very large ship, sails set, coming in fast toward shore. There was no one moving on deck, and no one stood at the wheel. Yet the ship dodged the shoals and shallows as expertly as any fisherman on the island. Just when it seemed she would run aground, every sail dropped instantly and the ship drifted gently forward until her keel lightly touched the sandy shore. And then, with a horrible shout, the hatch crashed open and a group of glowing skeletons came swarming out onto the deck. They were a merry crew, joking and laughing as they handed around spades and shovels. Then they came filing down the plank, carrying a dead body.

The skeletons came right toward the rock. They stopped a few yards from the treasure hunter and started to dig. Almost instantly there was a deep hole, and the spades rang as they hit metal. The treasure hunter caught a glimpse of a large box filled with gold and silver, onto which the corpse was tumbled. As the hole was refilled, one of the skeletons looked toward the blue rock. It spotted the intruder and came for him, followed by its ghastly crewmates.

The treasure hunter was so stiff with fear that he couldn't run. The skeletons swarmed around him like bees and lifted him up, bearing him back toward the hole. Realizing that they intended to bury him alive with the corpse, the treasure hunter gave an almighty screech that frightened even these terrible ghosts. They dropped him, and his head fell with a bang against a rock.

For a moment he saw stars. But fear overcame dizziness, and he pushed himself up and turned to find that the phantoms were gone. No skeletons, no ship, no corpse, not even any treasure could be seen in the dim light of the moon.

This scared the treasure hunter even worse than the phantoms, and he hightailed it for home. When his friend arrived at the blue rock a little after midnight, all was dark and lonely. Quizzed the next day about his defection, the treasure hunter reluctantly told his friend the story. His unfeeling friend clapped him on the shoulder and said: "Better you than me." But somehow, neither of them ever went back to look for the treasure.

Fire

A Myth from the Alabama Tribe

retold by S.E. Schlosser

In the beginning of the world, it was Bear who owned Fire. It warmed Bear and his people on cold nights and gave them light when it was dark. Bear and his people carried fire with them wherever they went.

One day, Bear and his people came to a great forest, where they found many acorns lying on the forest floor. Bear set Fire at the edge of the forest, and he and his people began eating acorns. The acorns were crunch and crisp and tasted better than any other acorns Bear and his people had ever eaten. They wandered further and further away from Fire, eating the delicious acorns and seeking out more when the acorn supply grew low.

Fire blazed up merrily for awhile, until it had burned nearly all of its wood. It started to smoke and flicker, then it dwindled down and down. Fire was alarmed. It was nearly out. "Feed me! Feed me!" Fire shouted to Bear. But Bear and his people had wandered deep into the forest, and then did not hear Fire's cries.

At that moment, Man came walking through the forest and saw the small, flickering Fire. "Feed me! Feed me!" Fire cried in despair.

"What should I feed you?" Man asked. He had never seen Fire before.

"I eat sticks and logs and wood of all kinds," Fire explained.

Man picked up a stick and leaned it on the North side of Fire. Fire sent its orange-blue flames flickering up the side of the stick until it started to burn. Man got a second stick and laid it on the West side of the fire. Fire, nourished by the first stick, burned brighter and stretched taller and eagerly claimed the second stick. Man picked up a third stick and laid it on the south side of Fire and laid a fourth stick on the East. By this time, Fire was leaping and dancing in delight, its hunger satisfied. Man warmed himself by the blazing Fire, enjoying the changed colors and the hissing and snapping sound Fire made as it ate the wood. Man and Fire were very happy together, and Man fed Fire sticks whenever it got hungry.

A long time later, Bear and his people came back to the edge of the forest, looking for Fire. Fire was angry when it saw Bear. It blazed until it was white-hot and so bright that Bear had to shade his eyes with both paws. "I do not even know you!" Fire shouted at Bear. The terrible heat rolling off Fire drove Bear and his people away, so they could not take it and carry it away with them.

And now Fire belongs to Man.

The First Tears

An Inuit Myth

Once long ago, Man went hunting along the water's edge for seals. To Man's delight, many seals were crowded together along the seashore. He would certainly bring home a great feast for Woman and Son. He crept cautiously towards the seals. The seals grew restless. Man slowed down. Suddenly, the seals began to slip into the water. Man was frantic. His feast was getting away.

Then Man saw a single seal towards the back of the group. It was not moving as quickly as the others. Ah! Here was his prize. He imagined the pride on Woman's face, the joy in Son's eyes. Their bellies would be filled for many days from such a seal.

Man crept towards the last seal. It did not see him, or so Man thought. Suddenly, it sprang away and slipped into the water. Man rose to his feet. He was filled with a strange emotion. He felt water begin to drip from his eyes. He touched his eyes and tasted the drops. Yes, they tasted like salty water. Strange choking sounds were coming from his mouth and chest.

Son heard the cries of Man and called Woman. They ran to the seashore to find out what was wrong with Man. Woman and Son were alarmed to see water flowing out of Man's eyes.

Man told them about the shore filled with seals. He told how he had hunted them, and how every seal had escaped his knife. As he spoke, water began to flow from the eyes of Woman and Son, and they cried with Man. In this way, people first learned to weep.

Later, Man and Son hunted a seal together. They killed it and used its skin to make snares for more seals.

The Golden One

A Michigan Folktale

He was a bright, sunny child from birth, with blond curls and a sweet smile and fabulous, shining blue eyes. Everyone who met him loved him. The whole church and farming community watch with joy as he took his first steps, said his first words, became a mischievous toddler and then a bright and lovable schoolboy. The summer he turned seven, he grew pale and thin. When he developed a cough, his mother called in the doctor. The doctor looked grave, and took the parents aside to give them the diagnosis. It was tuberculosis, and there was no cure. Worse, it was very contagious, and he had to be kept from the other children and the community. His parents were crushed. Their sunshine boy took the news stoically. He would miss his friends, but he did not want anyone else to catch his illness.

He was no longer strong enough to run and play, and had no one to fill his lonely hours except his parents. His father went out a few days after the doctor's visit and bought a beautiful golden pony and a little cart that he could drive around the community roads whenever his health permitted. Thereafter, the little boy with the sweet smile and shining blue eyes would often be seen driving his little golden pony down the roads. He would grin and wave to the other little chaps as he passed them, and they would stop their games long enough to call greetings or impart the latest gossip from the classroom, though they were forbidden to draw too close to the cart for fear of catching his disease. The farmers in the fields would wave to him and he would smile shyly in return.

The golden pony was his best friend, that long, weary summer as he slowly lost his strength. The disease was progressing rapidly, but each day he pushed passed the weariness and went to the barn to brush and curry his pony. He would spend hours in the little horse's stall, and would sit on the fence as the little pony grazed in the field. On the good days, he would hitch the pony to the cart and drive around. But the good days grew few, and one day he was too weak to walk out to the barn. The little pony fretted and looked for him all day. Inside the house, the little boy fretted and asked about his pony. When his father came in that night, he picked up his small son and carried him out to the barn to pet the little golden horse before he put him to bed for the very last time.

The little boy died in the night, and his grieved parents clung together and cried when they found him the next day. The whole farm community was stricken with the tragedy. Food and gifts filled the house. Out in the field, the little golden pony looked and looked for his little friend, but the boy never came. The father stood beside him for an hour the night before the funeral, brushing and combing him and trying to explain to the little animal why his son could not come to see him.

The parents tenderly dressed their little son in his best suit, and the whole community came to their house for the funeral. After the final words were spoken, the father hitched up the wagon, and the pall bearers carried the small coffin out and laid it in the back. The father solemnly drove the wagon, with his wife beside him, out onto the road. The preacher walked directly behind the wagon, followed by the aunts and uncles and cousins and all the members of the tight community.

Everyone was solemn, and there was not a dry eye among them.

As they passed the field next to the house, the little golden pony looked up from his

listless grazing. He watched the wagon go by, sniffing the air as he caught a familiar scent. He gave a funny whinny of recognition, and then galloped with all his small strength toward the fence. He gave a mighty leap, and love must have helped that little animal, because he soared over the top of that tall fence and landed safely on the other side. The father stopped the wagon and everyone watched as the little horse trotted up to the rear and nosed the simple wooden coffin inside the wagon. The boy's mother broke down completely then. The preacher motioned the crowd away from the little, grieving animal and nodded to the father. The father signaled to the horses and the wagon set off for the cemetery, followed by the little horse, and then by the members of the community.

The parents stood beside the little pony at the gravesite, and the three beings who loved the boy best of all watched as he was tenderly laid in the ground. The preacher said a few last words, and slowly the crowd disbursed. After thanking the preacher, the father got into the wagon and drove it home. His wife declined the ride. Instead, she stayed beside the grave for awhile longer, stroking the little gold horse. Finally, she grasped her son's best friend by the halter, and together, they walked down the dusty road towards home.

Gollywopper's Eggs

A New England Legend

Well now, when old Johnson came to town, I knew there'd be trouble. That Yankee Peddler was a scoundrel if ever I saw one. But I was laid up with my rheumatism when he arrived, so I couldn't do anything about it.

My neighbors often came to visit with me, since I was a poor widow-woman. (Metaphorically speaking. I was actually the richest woman in town, since my late husband had made a fortune in shipping.) Mistress Sarah Smith came to see me two days after Peddler Johnson appeared with his wares. She was bubbling over with the news. She had, just that morning, bought two of the very rare Gollywopper Eggs from Peddler Johnson, for the outrageous price of five dollars a-piece. I was flabbergasted.

"What in tarnation is a Gollywopper?" I demanded irritably, trying to sit up in my chair. My rheumatism gave me a painful stab and I settled back against the cushions. Mistress Smith smiled at me kindly, obviously pitying my ignorance.

"A Gollywopper is a rare sort of eating bird, like a gigantic chicken, found only on a tiny island in the West Indies called There'sOneBornEveryMinute," she explained. "Fortunately, Peddler Johnson saved the life of the chief of the island and was awarded with one full setting of eggs from this priceless bird. Everyone in town is buying eggs as fast as Johnson can sell them. I came to see if you wanted me to buy some for you. Of course, Peddler Johnson could not guarantee that my eggs will hatch out to be a breeding pair of Gollywoppers, but I am hopeful."

I snorted irritably. "Sounds like a hoax to me."

"Now Anna, you think everything is a hoax," Mistress Smith laughed easily. "I am keeping the eggs warm by the fire. They should hatch out in a month."

After a few more kindly words, Mistress Smith left. After pondering the situation for another hour, I hauled myself out of my chair, reached for my cane, and walked stiffly down the path to the Smith household, muttering "There's one born every minute, eh? Just what are you trying to pull, Peddler Johnson?"

Mistress Smith was startled to see me hobbling painfully up to her door.

"Why Anna, you shouldn't be up!" she cried.

"I came to see these Gollywopper Eggs of yours, Sarah Smith," I said grimly. Mistress Smith tucked me into the kitchen rocker and then proudly pulled out a pair of large hairy round objects. I recognized them at once.

"Sarah Smith, those aren't eggs at all. That peddler sold you a pair of coconuts!" I said. "You can buy them for a penny a dozen down in the West Indies."

"Coconuts? What are coconuts?"

"They are the fruit of the coconut palm tree. Good eating, but definitely not an egg," I said. "My late husband, may he rest-in-peace, used to bring cargoes of coconuts back on his ships."

"Then Peddler Johnson cheated me!" Sarah Smith said indignantly.

"Yes he did," I replied.

We put our heads together then, and thought up a plan to rid ourselves of the pesky peddler and get the town's money back.

The next day, Peddler Johnson dropped by my house to show his wares to a poor widow woman. Mistress Smith and several of the neighborhood ladies came for a visit just as he was displaying the fabled "Gollywhopper's Eggs".

"You mean these coconuts?" I asked calmly. Peddler Johnson swallowed and glanced nervously at the women assembled around his shiny wagon full of dry goods. "I've never heard anyone call them Gollywhopper's Eggs before. I will give you a penny for them."

"A penny for Gollywhopper's Eggs?" Mistress Smith said indignantly. "They are worth five dollars a-piece!"

"Five dollars a-piece for the fruit of a coconut palm tree?" I asked incredulously. "According to my late husband, coconuts are hardly worth a penny a dozen in the West Indies."

Peddler Johnson was looking rather green by now. Hastily, he told me that he had another appointment and tried to jump onto his wagon and drive away. But he was surrounded by angry ladies demanding their money back.

Finally, Peddler Johnson could take no more. He leapt away from his wagon and ran as fast as his legs could carry him down the road and out of town. The ladies gave chase, throwing all the remaining coconuts in his wagon after his retreating figure.

I reimbursed the ladies out of the money tin I found in the wagon and put the peddler's horse and wagon in my barn. Johnson must have crept back to get them in the night, because they were gone the next morning.

Peddler Johnson never ventured into our town again, and that was the last anyone ever heard of the fabled Gollywhopper's Eggs.

The Greenhorn and the Mule Egg

A Kansas Tall Tale

Well now, there was a chap that got real sick of working in the big city. One day, he quit his job, packed up his wife and kiddies, and hi-tailed it out to Kansas to become a farmer. Bought a big parcel of land with a grand old barn and some fields just ready to plow and plant.

Now, being a bit of a greenhorn, the poor fellow didn't know where to start with that there farm. His wife suggested that they get a mule to pull the plow for them, and the greenhorn thought this was as splendid idea. He set off down the road to visit their neighbor and ask him where he could buy a mule.

Well, that neighbor was a bit of a wag. He'd sized up his new neighbor as a greenhorn in about five seconds and decided to have a bit of fun with him.

"Well, you could advertise for a mule in the local paper," the neighbor said. "But if you want to do it the Kansas way, well then you should get yourself a mule egg and hatch your own. That way you can train the mule up from birth to do exactly as you want."

The greenhorn's eyes got real wide. "I didn't know mules hatched from eggs," he said excitedly. "Where do I get one?"

"It just so happens I have one mule egg left from the last batch I raised," the neighbor said. He went into the shed and came out with a round, hairy coconut. The greenhorn's eyes lit up.

"How much do I owe you?" he asked his neighbor.

"That'll be a dollar. And mind you, you've got to sit on the mule egg night and day for a week before it will hatch," the neighbor said, accepting the greenhorn's money and handing over the coconut.

Well, the greenhorn ran all the way home and showed the mule egg to his wife and kiddies. Everyone was thrilled with his purchase, and they all took turns sitting on the coconut, waiting for it to hatch. They waited one week. Then they waited two. By the third week, everyone's bottoms were sore from sitting on the hard coconut, and still there was no sign of a mule.

"It must be a bad egg," the wife said at last. "Better throw it out and see if our neighbor will give us our money back."

As the disappointed family watched, the greenhorn took the coconut outside and pitched it into the bushes. All at once, a giant jackrabbit burst out of the tall grass next to the bushes and hopped away lickety-split.

"It's the baby mule!" shouted one of the kiddies. "Catch it, Pa! Catch it."

Well, the greenhorn ran after that long-eared critter as fast as he could go, shouting: "I'm your mamma, baby mule! Please come back!" But he was no match for that jackrabbit. It darted here and there; it slithered hither and yon; and finally it slid down a hole in the ground and disappeared.

The greenhorn fell to the ground and lay panting in exhaustion. A few moments later, his wife and kids caught up with him and pulled him to his feet.

"Where's our mule?" asked his wife.

"The dad-blame thing got away," said the greenhorn. "And I'm not sorry it did. That's the speediest mule I ever laid eyes on, and I don't aim to plow that fast!"

Guardian of Yosemite A Native American Myth

For many nights and many days, the guardian spirit of Tisayac watched over the beautiful valley of Yosemite. Often, the gentle spirit would drift invisibly among the good folk of the valley, and it was during one of these visits that she noticed a tall, proud man named Tutokanula. He was a strong leader who greatly enhanced the lot of his people, and Tisayac came more often to the valley so that she could watch him. One day, Tutokanula was hunting near the place where Tisayac had laid down to rest. When she realized the proud leader was close by, the shy spirit peered out at him from among the trees. Seeing the beautiful woman with her golden hair and ethereal appearance, Tutokanula fell in love. Realizing it was the guardian of the valley, he reached out his hands to her, calling her by name. Confused by the rush of feelings inside her, Tisayac flew away, leaving a brokenhearted warrior behind. Tutokanula spent many days searching for Tisayac. Finally he left the valley and his people in despair. Without his wise guidance, the valley fell into ruin and most of the good folk left to find a new home.

When Tisayac returned again to her valley, she was horrified to find it barren and her people gone. When she learned that Tutokanula had forgotten his people, had left them to fend for themselves without the benefit of his great wisdom, and had spent many days and nights searching and longing for her, she cried out in despair. Kneeling upon a mighty dome of rock, Tisayac prayed with all her heart that the Great Spirit would undo this wrong and would restore to this land the virtue which had been lost.

Hearing her prayer, the Great Spirit took pity on the plight of her people. Stooping down from on high, he spread his hands over the valley. The green of new life poured forth over the land; trees blossomed, flowers bloomed, birds sang. Then he struck a mighty blow against the mountains and they broke apart, leaving a pathway for the melting snow to flow through. The water swirled and washed down upon the land, spilling over rocks, pooling into a lake and then wandering afar to spread life to other places. In the valley, the corn grew tall again, and the people came back to their home.

Then Tutokanula himself came to the valley when he heard that Tisayac had come home. Upon his return, he spent many hours carving his likeness into the stone so his people would remember him when he departed from this earth. When the carving was finished, Tutokanula sat down wearily at the foot of the beautiful Bridal Veil Falls the Great Spirit had created. Tisayac drifted into the spray of the falls, watching him. He was ready to depart from his people, from his valley. Would he go with her? She moved forward through the falling water and made herself visible. When Tutokanula saw Tisayac, he sprang to his feet with a cry of joy and she held out her arms to him. The brave warrior leapt into the falls and took his love into his arms at last. For a moment, there were two rainbows arching over the water. Then Tisayac drew him up and up into the clouds and away as the sun sank over Yosemite.

A Native American Myth (Hitchiti Tribe)

Heron and Hummingbird were very good friends, even though one was tall and gangly and awkward and one was small and sleek and fast. They both loved to eat fish. The Hummingbird preferred small fish like minnows and Heron liked the large ones.

One day, Hummingbird said to his friend: "I am not sure there are enough fish in the world for both of our kind to eat. Why don't we have a race to see which of us should own the fish?"

Heron thought that was a very good idea. They decided that they would race for four days. The finish line was an old dead tree next to a far-away river. Whichever of them sat on top of the tree first on the fourth day of the race would own all the fish in the world.

They started out the next morning. The Hummingbird zipped along, flying around and around the Heron, who was moving steadily forward, flapping his giant wings. Then Hummingbird would be distracted by the pretty flowers along the way. He would flit from one to the other, tasting the nectar. When Hummingbird noticed that Heron was ahead of him, he hurried to catch up with him, zooming ahead as fast as he could, and leaving Heron far behind. Heron just kept flying steadily forward, flapping his giant wings.

Hummingbird was tired from all his flitting. When it got dark, he decided to rest. He found a nice spot to perch and slept all night long. But Heron just kept flying steadily forward all night long, flapping his giant wings.

When Hummingbird woke in the morning, Heron was far ahead. Hummingbird had to fly as fast as he could to catch up. He zoomed past the big, awkward Heron and kept going until Heron had disappeared behind him. Then Hummingbird noticed some pretty flowers nearby. He zip-zipped over to them and tasted their nectar. He was enjoying the pretty scenery and didn't notice Heron flap-flapping passed him with his great wings.

Hummingbird finally remembered that he was racing with Heron, and flew as fast as he could to catch up with the big, awkward bird. Then he zipped along, flying around and around the Heron, who kept moving steadily forward, flapping his giant wings. For two more days, the Hummingbird and the Heron raced toward the far-distant riverbank with the dead tree that was the finish line. Hummingbird had a marvelous time sipping nectar and flitting among the flowers and resting himself at night. Heron stoically kept up a steady flap-flap-flapping of his giant wings, propelling himself forward through the air all day and all night.

Hummingbird woke from his sleep the morning of the fourth day, refreshed and invigorated. He flew zip-zip toward the riverbank with its dead tree. When it came into view, he saw Heron perched at the top of the tree! Heron had won the race by flying straight and steady through the night while Hummingbird slept.

So from that day forward, the Heron has owned all the fish in the rivers and lakes, and the Hummingbird has sipped from the nectar of the many flowers which he enjoyed so much during the race.

The King of Sharks

A Native American Myth from Hawaii

One day, the King of Sharks saw a beautiful girl swimming near the shore. He immediately fell in love with the girl. Transforming himself into a handsome man, he dressed himself in the feathered cape of a chief and followed her to her village.

The villagers were thrilled by the visit of a foreign chief. They made a great luau, with feasting and games. The King of Sharks won every game, and the girl was delighted when he asked to marry with her.

The King of Sharks lived happily with his bride in a house near a waterfall. The King of Sharks, in his human form, would swim daily in the pool of water beneath the falls. Sometimes he would stay underneath the water so long that his bride would grow frightened. But the King of Sharks reassured her, telling her that he was making a place at the bottom of the pool for their son.

Before the birth of the child, the King of Sharks returned to his people. He made his wife swear that she would always keep his feathered cape about the shoulders of their son. When the child was born, his mother saw a mark upon his back which looked like the mouth of a shark. It was then she realized who her husband had been.

The child's name was Nanave. As he grew towards manhood, Nanave would swim daily in the pool beside the house. Sometimes, his mother would gaze into the pool and see a shark swimming beneath the water.

Each morning, Nanave would stand beside the pool, the feathered cloak about his shoulders, and would ask the passing fishermen where they were going to fish that day. The fisherman always told the friendly youth where they intended to go. Then Nanave would dive into the pool and disappear for hours.

The fishermen soon noticed that they were catching fewer and fewer fish. The people of their village were growing hungry. The chief of the village called the people to the temple. "There is a bad god among us," the chief told the people. "He prevents our fishermen from catching fish. I will use my magic to find him." The chief laid out a bed of leaves. He instructed all the men and boys to walk among the leaves. A human's feet would bruise the tender leaves, but the feet of a god would leave no mark.

Nanave's mother was frightened. She knew her son was the child of a god, and he would be killed if the people discovered his identity. When it came turn for the youth to walk across the leaves, he ran fast, and slipped. A man caught at the feathered cape Nanave always wore to prevent him from being hurt. But the cape fell from the youth's shoulders, and all the people could see the shark's mouth upon his back.

The people chased Nanave out of the village, but he slipped away from them and dived into the pool. The people threw big rocks into the pool, filling it up. They thought they had killed Nanave. But his mother remembered that the King of Sharks had made a place for her son at the bottom of the pool, a passage that led to the ocean. Nanave had taken the form of a shark and had swum out to join his father, the King of Sharks, in the sea.

But since then, the fishermen have never told anyone where they go to fish, for fear the sharks will hear and chase the fish away.

The Lion and the Beetle

Lion was very proud and very vain. He loved to stomp around the savannah, roaring and growling whenever he saw his animal subjects - Giraffe or Hyena or Elephant or Gazelle or Ape - to show what a mighty Lion he was.

"I am a Very Mighty King!" he roared. And his subjects all bowed low before him.

One day, Lion looked into the mirror-like waters of the lake. He was struck by his own greatness. What a beautiful and noble creature I am, he thought.

"I am a Very Mighty King!" he roared. "I am a Very Mighty King!"

Lion preened and posed and pranced in front of the glassy lake for hours, admiring his greatness. Finally, Lion said: "I will show my devoted subjects that their leader is every inch a King."

Lion put on his fancy robes, his jeweled crown, and all his gold and silver medals. His clothes were very heavy, but they made him look mighty and grand.

"I am a Very Mighty King!" he roared in delight. "I am a Very Mighty King!"

Lion sent out a message to all his animal subjects - to Giraffe and Hyena and Elephant and Gazelle and Ape. He sent messages to all the animals living on the savannah or in the jungle, inviting them to a meeting on the parade grounds in front of his palace, where they could admire him in his finery.

And so the animals came to see Lion; the Giraffe and the Hyena and the Elephant and the Gazelle and the Ape. And many more animals came as well; from the stately Zebra in his black-and-white coat to the teeny, tiny Beetle, who was so little that he had to walk on the side of the road so the bigger animals would not step on him by accidents.

"I am small. I am little. People look down and can't see me," sang the Beetle as he scurried through the tall grass beside the road. "I am small. I am little. But inside, I'm tall as a tree!"

When the animals were assembled on the parade ground, there came a mighty trumpet blast from Elephant, and Lion came forth in all his grandeur.

"I am a Very Mighty King!" he roared. "I am a Very Mighty King!"

Lion strutted and preened and pranced before his animal subjects. The animals were awed by his splendor and bowed before him. Lion stomped through the rows of Elephants and Giraffes and Hyenas and Gazelles, roaring and growling to show how mighty he was.

"I am a Very Mighty King!" he roared. "I am a Very Mighty King!"

Then Lion saw the teeny tiny Beetle, standing alone by the side of the road. The Beetle was singing to himself as he watched the Lion. "I am small. I am little. People look down and can't see me," sang the Beetle as Lion strutted before his subjects. "I am small. I am little. But inside, I'm tall as a tree!"

Lion said to the Beetle: "You, Beetle, bow before me!"

Beetle said: "Your Royal Majesty, I know that I am small, but if you look at me closely, you will see that I *am* making a bow!"

Lion replied: "Beetle, you are hard to see down there! I am not sure that you are bowing to me."

Beetle said: "Look at me closely. I assure you that I am bowing."

Lion leaned over, peering down at the teeny tiny Beetle. His splendid robes, his jeweled crown and his many medals made him so top-heavy that Lion wobbled and

swayed as he loomed over the teeny tiny Beetle. Then Lion lost his balance and fell onto his head! His royal crown went flying off, and Lion rolled over and over, down the steep hill, and plopped into a ditch filled with muddy water. All the animals laughed and laughed when they saw the muddy Lion sprawled in the ditch. Frightened, the teeny tiny Beetle scurried away. And the bedraggled Lion scurried away too. He was *not* so very mighty, after all.

The Maid of the Mist

A Native American Myth Ongiaras Tribe retold by S. E. Schlosser

She lost her husband and her hope at a young age, and the beautiful girl could not find her way through the sorrow upon sorrow that was her lot in life. So she stepped one day into her canoe, singing a death song softly to herself, and paddle out into the current. Soon the canoe was caught by the rough waves and hurtled toward the falls. But as it pitched over and she fell, Heno, the god of thunder who lived in the falls, caught the maiden gently in his arms and carried her to his home beneath the thundering veil of water.

Heno and his sons ministered to the grieving girl, and she stayed with them until her heart healed within her. Then the younger son spoke words of love to the maiden and they married, to the delight of the god of thunder. A young son was born to the couple, and he followed his grandfather everywhere, learning what it meant to be a god of thunder.

The only shadow on the happiness of the maiden in the mist was a continual longing to see her people one more time. Her chance came in an unexpected and unwelcome way. A great snake came down the mighty river and poisoned the waters of her people. They grew sick and were dying. Soon the snake would return to devour the dead until my people were all gone. It was Heno himself who gave her the news, and she begged that she might return for one hour to warn her people of the danger. The god himself lifted her through the falls and set her down among her people to give warning about the evil snake that was causing such pestilence among them. She advised them to move to a higher country until the danger was past, and they agreed. Then Heno came and took the maiden back to her husband and her home. In a few days, the giant serpent returned to the village, seeking the bodies of those who had died from the poison it had spread. When the snake realized that the people had deserted the village, it hissed in rage and turned upstream to search for them. But Heno heard the voice of the serpent and rose up through the mist of the falls. He threw a great thunderbolt at the creature and killed it in one mighty blast. The giant body of the creature floated downstream and lodged just above the cataract, creating a large semi-circle that deflected huge amounts of water into the falls at the place just above the god's home. Horrified by this disastrous turn of events, Heno swept in through the falls and did his best to stop the massive influx of water, but it was too late.

Seeing that his home would soon be destroyed, Heno called for the maiden and his sons to come away with him. The younger son caught up his wife and child and followed Heno through the water of the falls and up into the sky, where the Thunderer made them a new home. From this place, they watch over the people of the earth, while Heno thunders in the clouds as he once thundered in the vapors of the great falls. To this day, an echo of the Heno's voice can be heard in the thunder of the mighty waters of Niagara Falls.

**Rabbit Plays Tug-of-War
A Native American Legend
(Creek/Muscogee Tribe)**

Now Rabbit had a favorite place on the river where he always went to drink water. It was on a bend in the river, and two Snakes lived there, one on the upper side of the bend and one on the lower. Rabbit soon learned that neither of the Snakes knew that the other Snake lived there.

Ho, ho, ho, thought Rabbit. I am going to have a bit of fun!

Rabbit went to the Snake that lived on the upper bend of the river. "I am a very strong Rabbit," he told the Snake. "I bet I can pull you right out of the water."

"I bet you can't!" said the Snake, who was very strong indeed.

"I will go get a grape vine," said Rabbit. "You will pull one end and I will pull the other. "If I pull you out of the water, I win the contest. If you pull me into the water, then I win."

The Snake on the upper bend agreed. Then Rabbit went to the Snake on the lower bend and made the same deal. He told both Snakes that he would be standing out of sight on top of the river bank and would give a whoop when he was in place and ready to start the contest. Both Snakes were pleased with the arrangement. They were sure they would win against such a feeble little Rabbit.

Rabbit took a long grape vine and strung it across the wide bend in the river. He handed one end to the first Snake and the other end to the second Snake. Then he gave a loud whoop from the middle of the river bank and the two Snakes started tugging and pulling with all their might.

"That Rabbit is really strong," thought the Snake on the upper bank. He would tug and tug and the vine would come a little closer to him and then he would nearly be pulled out of the water.

"My, Rabbit is much stronger than he appears," thought the Snake on the lower bank after he was almost hurled out of the water by an extra strong pull from up the river. Rabbit sat on the bank above both Snakes and laughed and laughed. The Snakes heard him laughing and realized that they had been fooled. Letting go of the rope, they swam to the middle of the bend and met each other for the first time.

Both Snakes were angry with Rabbit for making them look foolish. They agreed that Rabbit could no longer drink from his favorite place on the river bend where they lived. In spite of his protests, they sent Rabbit away and would not let him come down to the riverbank anymore. So whenever Rabbit grew thirsty, he had to turn himself into a faun in order to get a drink from the river.

After that, Rabbit decided not to play any more jokes on Snakes.

Rainbow Crow (Lenni Lenape Tribe)

It was so cold. Snow fell constantly, and ice formed over all the waters. The animals had never seen snow before. At first, it was a novelty, something to play in. But the cold increased tenfold, and they began to worry. The little animals were being buried in the snow drifts and the larger animals could hardly walk because the snow was so deep. Soon, all would perish if something were not done.

"We must send a messenger to Kijiamuh Ka'ong, the Creator Who Creates By Thinking What Will Be," said Wise Owl. "We must ask him to think the world warm again so that Spirit Snow will leave us in peace."

The animals were pleased with this plan. They began to debate among themselves, trying to decide who to send up to the Creator. Wise Owl could not see well during the daylight, so he could not go. Coyote was easily distracted and like playing tricks, so he could not be trusted. Turtle was steady and stable, but he crawled too slowly. Finally, Rainbow Crow, the most beautiful of all the birds with shimmering feathers of rainbow hues and an enchanting singing voice, was chosen to go to Kijiamuh Ka'ong.

It was an arduous journey, three days up and up into the heavens, passed the trees and clouds, beyond the sun and the moon, and even above all the stars. He was buffeted by winds and had no place to rest, but he carried bravely on until he reached Heaven. When Rainbow Crow reached the Holy Place, he called out to the Creator, but received no answer. The Creator was too busy thinking up what would be to notice even the most beautiful of birds. So Rainbow Crow began to sing his most beautiful song.

The Creator was drawn from his thoughts by the lovely sound, and came to see which bird was making it. He greeted Rainbow Crow kindly and asked what gift he could give the noble bird in exchange for his song. Rainbow Crow asked the Creator to un-think the snow, so that the animals of Earth would not be buried and freeze to death. But the Creator told Rainbow Crow that the snow and the ice had spirits of their own and could not be destroyed.

"What shall we do then?" asked the Rainbow Crow. "We will all freeze or smother under the snow."

"You will not freeze," the Creator reassured him, "For I will think of Fire, something that will warm all creatures during the cold times."

The Creator stuck a stick into the blazing hot sun. The end blazed with a bright, glowing fire which burned brightly and gave off heat. "This is Fire," he told Rainbow Crow, handing him the cool end of the stick. "You must hurry to Earth as fast as you can fly before the stick burns up."

Rainbow Crow nodded his thanks to the Creator and flew as fast as he could go. It was a three-day trip to Heaven, and he was worried that the Fire would burn out before he reached the Earth. The stick was large and heavy, but the fire kept Rainbow Crow warm as he descended from Heaven down to the bright path of the stars. Then the Fire grew hot as it came closer to Rainbow Crow's feathers. As he flew past the Sun, his tail caught on fire, turning the shimmering beautiful

feathers black. By the time he flew passed the Moon, his whole body was black with soot from the hot Fire. When he plunged into the Sky and flew through the clouds, the smoke got into his throat, strangling his beautiful singing voice.

By the time Rainbow Crow landed among the freezing-cold animals of Earth, he was black as tar and could only Caw instead of sing. He delivered the fire to the animals, and they melted the snow and warmed themselves, rescuing the littlest animals from the snow drifts where they lay buried.

It was a time of rejoicing, for Tindeh - Fire - had come to Earth. But Rainbow Crow sat apart, saddened by his dull, ugly feathers and his rasping voice. Then he felt the touch of wind on his face. He looked up and saw the Creator Who Creates By Thinking What Will Be walking toward him.

"Do not be sad, Rainbow Crow," the Creator said. "All animals will honor you for the sacrifice you made for them. And when the people come, they will not hunt you, for I have made your flesh taste of smoke so that it is no good to eat and your black feathers and hoarse voice will prevent man from putting you into a cage to sing for him. You will be free."

Then the Creator pointed to Rainbow Crow's black feathers. Before his eyes, Rainbow Crow saw the dull feathers become shiny and inside each one, he could see all the colors of the rainbow. "This will remind everyone who sees you of the service you have been to your people," he said, "and the sacrifice you made that saved them all."

And so shall it ever be.

The Talking Mule

A South Carolina Tall Tale

retold by

S. E. Schlosser

A farmer owned a mule which he used for work all week. But being a Church-going man, he let the mule rest on Sunday.

One Sunday, the farmer had to go to a funeral. So he sent his son to saddle the mule.

"Since when do I have to work on Sunday?" asked the mule.

The boy dropped the saddle and ran to the house.

"Paw, the mule talked!" he shouted.

"Can't you even saddle the mule?" asked the farmer.

"But Paw, the mule don't want to work on Sunday," the boy protested.

The farmer sent the boy to his room for talking crazy and went out to saddle the mule.

"Move over," he said to the mule.

"Where's my supper?" asked the mule.

The farmer dropped the saddle in the same spot as his boy and ran out of the barn, followed by the dog.

"I ain't never heard a mule talk before," he gasped.

"Me neither," said the dog.

The man bolted for the house and slammed the door.

"The mule talked!" he told his wife.

"What!" said his wife.

"And when I exclaimed: 'I ain't never heard a mule talk before', the dog said: 'Me neither'."

"That's crazy," said his wife.

"What's so crazy about that?" asked the cat. "Haven't you ever heard of a talking mule?"

Tall Ted's Turtles

A Tongue Twister Tale

Tall Ted Thompson parked his traveling turtle tank on Tenth Street in front of Tonawanda Town Hall. Tall Ted's traveling Turtle Aquarium was a big attraction in Tonawanda. Timmie Torlish and his twin sister Trish ran to push their noses against the tanks windows to take a look at the turtles as Tall Ted walked up Tenth Street to talk to the mayor.

It was Timmie who noticed Travis Taylor staring intently at the turtles swimming and sunning themselves in Tall Ted's turtle tank.

"Look at Terrible Travis!" Timmie whispered to Trish.

"I bet he wants to steal Tall Ted's turtles and make them into turtle soup," said Trish. "Last month, he stole Farmer Tom's turtles right out of the pond!"

"Well, he can't steal these turtles. They are safely locked away in Tall Ted's tank," said Timmie to his twin.

When the twins were done watching turtles, they headed up the street toward Town Hall, which had a huge tulip tree out front that was easy to climb. Suddenly, Timmie heard a thud from somewhere behind them. Timmie and Trish turned around and saw that Terrible Travis had unhooked the door to Tall Ted's turtle tank. Water leaked out of the turtle tank. Then, the door to the tank trembled and burst open. Out tumbled a ton of water and all of Tall Ted's turtles. Turtles of all sizes toppled over and over as the torrent tore down Tenth Street, scrambling desperately toward the sidewalk in their effort to get out of the raging torrent.

"Ted's turtles are loose," yelled Trish. "Quick, Timmie, go get Tall Ted."

Timmie toppled out of the tulip tree and ran to get Ted. Trish jumped down behind him and hurried onto Tenth Street to try to capture Tall Ted's turtles.

Tenth Street was a mess! Turtles were traipsing everywhere, and the gutters were overflowing with water. Tracey Timmons the local school teacher tripped over two of Tall Ted's Turtles and dropped her grocery bag full of tomatoes. Twenty turtles meandered into Toy Town and ten turtles got caught in the revolving door of the Tenth Street Savings and Loan and were tossed into the lap of a surprised teller who was taking a lunch break.

Officer Todd Tabbot, Tonawanda's town policeman, stopped traffic so Tall Ted could collect his turtles. Timmie, Trish and the shopkeepers all helped Tall Ted.

"How did my tank break?" asked Tall Ted, scratching his head in puzzlement.

"Terrible Travis unhooked the door to the tank," the twins told Tall Ted. "We think he wants to make Turtle Soup for his truck stop."

Tall Ted's eyes widened when he heard this report. "That could explain why twenty of my turtles are missing," Tall Ted exclaimed.

Tall Ted, the twins and Officer Talbot took Tall Ted's traveling turtle tank over to Taylor's Truck Stop to talk to Terrible Travis. They found Travis heating up a huge pot of water. In a tank behind him swam twenty turtles. All the turtles had the special tag that Tall Ted hooked onto their shells to help people identify his pets.

Terrible Travis turned pale when he saw Tall Ted and Officer Talbot.

"I give up," Travis cried when Tall Ted showed Todd Talbot the tags his turtles

wore. Todd Talbot arrested Travis for stealing Tall Ted's turtles and for tampering with Tall Ted's traveling turtle tank.

Tall Ted shook hands with Timmie and Trish Torlish and gave them a turtle to take care of as a reward for turning in Travis Taylor. Then Tall Ted got into his traveling turtle tank and drove down Tenth Street to Tonawanda Town Hall to finish his talk with the mayor.

Ten Red Crows

A Chinese Folktale

First the world was in darkness, my son. All who dwelt in the shadow of the East Mulberry Tree had never seen the light, nor could they imagine what it was. And so ten red crows – each with three paws – began a perilous journey away from the tree seeking to bring light to this dark world.

Long they flew, through paths both dangerous and dull, until their eyes saw something glowing before them in the darkness of space. They came to a heavenly realm; a place of brilliant light and heat. The red crows were delighted with the new-found realm, and dwelt there a long time, learning the secrets of light and heat. As they grew more skilled in the magic of the heavenly realm, their bodies were transformed so that they gave forth brilliant light of many colors and radiated the same intense heat as their hosts.

When they had plumed all the mysteries in the brilliant heaven, the ten red crows turned and flew back toward Earth. They were each as bright as a star, and the heat they emitted from their bodies was intense. Those who dwelt near the East Mulberry Tree first knew of their coming when a faint glow appeared on the dark horizon. Then the world lit up, colors shining brilliantly against a sky that was azure blue. But as the crows grew nearer, the light became a searing blue-white light, and with it came heat that was unbearable. It burned everything it touched. When the ten red crows perched in the East Mulberry Tree, the whole of the Earth began to dry up and wither in the intense heat. All who dwelt in the shadow of the Tree were afraid.

“Help us!” they cried in pain, rolling on the green grass and covering their sore eyes against the heat and the brilliance of the ten red crows.

Yi, the Good Archer, heard their cries and saw that the ten red crows were bringing death to the world instead of light. So he took up his bow and counted out nine arrows. Then, one by one, he shot the red crows. Each fell out of the brilliant blue-white sky and burned away to nothing in the darkness of space. But Yi spared the life of the tenth red crow so that light would not be lost to the world. To this day, the tenth Red Crow rises each morning from his perch on the East Mulberry Tree and flies once around the world until he comes to rest once again in the Great Solar Tree.

And so it comes to pass that the Tenth Red Crow now dwells in the Heavens as the Sun.

The Wampus Cat

A Tennessee Spooky Story

They say that the Wampus cat used to be a beautiful Indian woman. The men of her tribe were always going on hunting trips, but the women had to stay home. The Indian woman secretly followed her husband one day when he went hunting with the other men. She hid herself behind a rock, clutching the hide of a mountain cat around her, and spied on the men as they sat around their campfires telling sacred stories and doing magic.

According to the laws of the tribe, it was absolutely forbidden for women to hear the sacred stories and see the tribe's magic. So when the Indian woman was discovered, the medicine man punished her by binding her into the mountain cat skin she wore and then transforming her into a terrible monster - half woman and half mountain cat. Ever after she was doomed to roam the hills, howling desolately because she desires to return to her normal body.

A man was hunting one night with his dogs when they both whimpered and ran off the path. At that moment, the woods were overpowered with a horrible smell like that of a wet animal that had fallen into a bog after it messed with a skunk. Then something howled on the path behind him and the man whirled around, dropping his rifle. His heart pounding with fear, the man found himself staring into the big, glowing yellow eyes of the Wampus Cat. The creature had huge fangs dripping with saliva. It looked kind of like a mountain lion, but it was walking upright like a man. Then it howled, and the man's skin nearly turned inside out in horror.

With a scream of terror, the man leapt backwards and ran as fast as he could through the woods, the Wampus Cat on his heels. He fled to the home of a friend who lived nearby, and burst through the front door only a breath ahead of the creature. His friend slammed the door in the face of the Wampus Cat. Instantly, it started shuddering under the weight of the attacking monster. The man's friend grabbed his Bible and started reading aloud from the Psalms. Upon hearing the holy words, the Wampus Cat howled in frustration and then slowly abandoned its attack and went back into the woods.

The man spent the rest of the night at his friend's place. When he went home at daybreak, he found his dogs huddled in the barn, shaken but still alive. The man never hunted after dark again.

Xing-Xing Sings

An Extremely Hard Tongue Twister

The Xenos family lived in a rambling old house called Xanadu. Xavier was a xylographer, which meant that he worked all day engraving words on wood. His wife Xenia made lovely xenogardens; gardens in which all of the plants - like cactus and sage brush - thrive in dry weather.

The Xenos' children, Xander and Xylana, were twins. Xander played in the band at school with his best friend Max Pax. Xander played the xylophone and Max Pax played the sax.

Xylana Xenos loved to bake. Every day after school, she and her best friend Trixie Pixie extracted juices, examined ingredients, and cooked creative cookies. They hummed along as Xander and Max played duets on xylophone and sax. In the corner of the kitchen, Xing-Xing Xenops, their pet parrot, would sit on her swing and sing. "My, something smells lovely in here," Xenia exclaimed exuberantly, breezing in the kitchen door one sunny Saturday afternoon. She kissed her daughter, waved hello to Trixie Pixie and wandered out to work in the garden with Xephyr her pet Xenurine armadillo at her heels. "Xander, play the Box Song," she shouted over her shoulder as she slipped through the screen door.

"Box! Box!" exclaimed Xing-Xing Xenops excitedly. Everyone in the Xenos family loved the Box Song. Max blew a long note on the sax and Xander thundered a dramatic chord on his xylophone. Then they played the Box Song while Xylana Xenos, Trixie Pixie and Xing-Xing Xenops sang along.

"We know its unorthodox, but we really love our lox, and better still we love to box, and gift-wrap too. Woodbox and workbook and toolbox and tinderbox Bobby Fox collects socks, so why don't you?"

We're standing on our soapbox to save all the muskox; eliminate the fowlpox and cowpox too. Shoebox and shadowbox and saucebox and sandbox Bobby Fox collects socks, so why don't you?"

Xavier came into the kitchen with Xypher the Xenurine armadillo to claim a cookie from Xylana, as Xander and Max played a musical interlude on xylophone and sax. Xenia came to the back door to listen to the last verse of the Box Song, carrying an ailing Xanthium plant in her arms.

"We know it's a paradox to outfox a jukebox; To laminate a letterbox and boombox too. Postbox and pillbox and pepperbox and pegbox Bobby Fox collects socks, so why don't you?"

We don't mean to flummox the champion chatterbox who handles the hatbox of Mrs. La Foux. Juicebox and junkbox and loosebox and lunchbox Bobby Fox collects socks, so why don't you?"

Everyone shouted out the last line at the top of their voices as Xing-Xing Xenops flew around the kitchen exclaiming: "Bobby Fox! Bobby Fox!"

It was lunchtime on Sunday when the Xenos family realized that Xing-Xing Xenops had gone missing! The Xenos family rushed around the house, calling frantically for Xing-Xing. Xavier looked under the bed in the Master suite while Xenia climbed up to examine the attic. Xander rushed into the living room to look among his comic books and Xylana explored the creepy corners of the cellar. But Xing-Xing nowhere to be found.

"Where can she be?" Xenia wailed woefully as the family met back in the kitchen. Suddenly, they heard a cackling cry from outside. The Xenos family started in surprise. The cry sounded like Xing-Xing Xenops. But what was she doing outside? The family burst out the back door and looked wildly around for Xing-Xing. "There she is," cried Xander, pointing toward the top of Xavier's Xenography workshop.

"Bobby Fox collects socks!" Xing-Xing Xenops chirped cheerily from her place on the roof.

"Xing-Xing Xenops, you come down!" cried Xylana.

Xing-Xing blinked at Xylana. Then she flew over to sit on a nearby statue of Xenophon, the Greek philosopher.

Xenia tiptoed up behind the naughty Xenops parrot, hoping to catch her by surprise. Xing-Xing stepped sideways to avoid Xenia's outstretched hand. Then Xing-Xing Xenops saw Xavier sneaking toward her from the far side of the statue. Xing-Xing squawked and flapped away. Up and up she flew, until she landed on a thin branch at the peak of a tall pine.

"Bobby Fox collects socks!" Xing-Xing exhorted exuberantly from the top of the tree while the Xenos family exclaimed in frustration.

"Now what do we do?" Xander cried.

"We need a ladder," Xylana said. "I'll get one from the garage."

"That ladder in the garage is too small," said Xavier gloomily. "We will have to call the fire department and ask them to rescue Xing-Xing Xenops."

"It wouldn't work," Xenia said. "Xing-Xing Xenops would just fly away as soon as the firemen climbed up to her perch. But don't worry. I have an idea!"

The Xenos family huddled around Xenia as she whispered her plan. Xing-Xing Xenops watched suspiciously from her place in the pine. She couldn't hear what Xenia was saying. Her perch was too far away. But Xing-Xing Xenops could see what was happening in the yard below.

Xing-Xing watched the children hurry into the house while Xavier and Xenia set up several deck chairs in the xenogarden. She saw Max Pax and Trixie Pixie trot up the lane and gallop through the front gate of Xanadu. She smelled wonderful baking smells wafting from the kitchen while Xavier and Xenia discussed the climax of the Codex Caper, a movie they'd seen recently at the Duplex Theater.

Xing-Xing fluttered to a lower branch in the pine tree, feeling peeved and perplexed. Why wasn't anyone paying attention to her? Couldn't they see Xing-Xing cutting a caper in the tree above their heads?

Xing-Xing watched Xypher the Xenurine armadillo nudge through the back door and climb into Xavier's lap. Xing-Xing hooted harshly in annoyance. She wanted to sit in Xavier's lap! But she wasn't ready to abandon her tree.

Xylana came out of the kitchen carrying a huge plate full of chocolate-chip cookies. Xing-Xing perked up. She *loved* chocolate-chip cookies! A moment later, Trixie Pixie came outside with a tray. On the tray were tall glasses full of milk. Xing-Xing loved milk even more than cookies! Xing-Xing fluttered to a lower branch, watching eagerly as Xylana handed around chocolate-chip cookies and Trixie gave out glasses of milk.

Xander came through the back door wheeling his xylophone on its travel trolley,

followed by Max Pax carrying his sax. Xing-Xing reared back on her pine perch and flapped her wings excitedly. "Bobby Fox collects socks! Bobby Fox collects socks," she called exuberantly.

Starting with a dramatic roll on the xylophone, Xander Xenos and Max Pax played the introduction to the Box Song, and everybody sang:

"We know its unorthodox, but we really love our lox, and better still we love to box and gift-wrap too. Woodbox and workbox and toolbox and tinderbox Bobby Fox collects socks, so why don't you?"

Xing-Xing Xenops fluttered down from the tree and landed on the back of Xyphyr the Xenurine armadillo, who was still curled up on Xavier's lap. Xing-Xing fluffed up her feathers until she was as round as a ball and sang her favorite song at the top of her voice. She was louder than the whole Xenos family combined, even with the help of their friends.

Xing-Xing didn't bat an eye when Xavier Xenos scooped her up with both hands and marched her inside the house. She was too busy singing the Box Song to care about her capture.

"Hurrah!" shouted Xylana and Trixie. "The plan worked!"

"Should we stop singing?" Xander and Max asked as they played the musical interlude between the first and second verse.

"Bobby Fox collects socks, so why don't you?" Xing-Xing called from the kitchen. Everyone laughed.

"There's your answer!" said Xenia Xenos, "Xing-Xing wants you to sing!"

And so they did.