

The cover features a decorative border of autumn leaves in shades of yellow, orange, and brown, scattered around the edges. At the bottom, there is a row of tall, thin grasses in similar autumnal colors.

TABITHA'S MAGICAL VOICE

by Tiffany Prochera

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Tabitha didn't like her voice. In fact, she more than didn't like it. She hated it with a passion. Sure, people told her she could sing just fine but she assumed they were just being polite and didn't believe them.

No, whenever Tabitha opened her mouth she could hear all the little squeaks and the going off tunes and they drove her crazy. She wanted to like her voice because she secretly loved singing but she thought she was so bad that she couldn't even bring herself to sing Happy Birthday in a crowd. She thought that she shouldn't sing at all, ever.

But Tabitha's little sister, Caitlyn, loved her voice. She kept asking Tabitha to sing to her but Tabitha had come to dislike her voice so much she started saying "No." Caitlyn would beg her and beg her, even to the point of tears, but she would still refuse.

On Caitlyn's fifth birthday, friends and family came to the house for a big party. After games had been played, food had been eaten and presents had been opened, everyone gathered around the dining room table for cake.

Tabitha's mother stepped out of the kitchen carrying a huge cake with pink and white frosting, multi-coloured balloons drawn on top and a big candle in the shape of a five standing up in the middle. Caitlyn's eyes grew bigger than her head when she saw it and she clapped her hands with delight.

"Happy birthday to meeee!" she squealed.

"Alright everybody," Tabitha's mother said excitedly, "On the count of three. One, two three."

Then the whole room full of people – grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends from her pre-school class - started singing "Happy Birthday" to Caitlyn. Everyone except Tabitha, who kept her lips tight together in case a note decided to try and escape. Caitlyn noticed Tabitha's mouth wasn't moving and her excited grin turned into a sad little frown. She stared at Tabitha with disappointment in her eyes.

"Tabby, why aren't you singing for me?" she asked. She looked at her mother, "Mommy, Tabby isn't singing for me."

The party guests became quiet, wondering what the big deal was. Tabitha's mother didn't want to attract attention but she couldn't just ignore the birthday girl's concern.

"Tabitha, please," she pleaded softly.

"Mom," Tabitha protested in a whisper, "you know I don't like -"

"I know it makes you nervous, honey, but it's her birthday."

Then everybody else joined in, trying to be encouraging but making Tabitha feel even worse.

"C'mon Tab, show us what ya got!" said her grandpa Joe.

"Why on earth wouldn't you sing 'Happy Birthday' to your own sister?" asked her Aunt Cathy.

"Really, you don't sound that bad," said her cousin Brad.

Tabitha's head was swimming with fear and confusion, all of those people staring at her. Why couldn't they just leave her alone? Then she got mad, at her sister for caring whether she sang or not and at her mother for making a fuss about it.

"NO!" she screamed, "I don't want to sing! I am twelve years old! I am not a baby and I don't have to do it if I don't want to! Leave me alone!"

The guests gasped, surprised at the outburst. Tabitha slammed her fist down, sending a fork flying off the dining room table and onto the floor with a little bit of frosting landing on her dress. She ran out of the house with only thin slippers on her feet instead of real shoes. As she raced towards the wooded area behind the house she could hear her mother calling after her and her father saying, "She just needs time to cool off. She'll be back soon."

Tabitha didn't want to go back, at least not until everyone had left the house. She was angry at them all and was so embarrassed for making such a scene. Tears ran down her face until she could hardly see through them. She was getting warm running in the summer heat with the sun still shining very brightly in the late afternoon. She kept running and running and the woods became darker and darker until she had gone further into the woods than she had ever gone before. She slowed down to a walk, worried now that she might not be able to find her way back to the house.

Tabitha noticed a ray of light coming down through the trees in the distance and kept walking until she reached a clearing littered with leaves and sticks of all shapes and sizes. It was quite pretty actually.

"This could be a good place to rest for a bit," she thought to herself. She was tired and her legs were sore from all the running she had done.

Tabitha took a step into the clearing and felt a crunch underneath her feet.

"Hey!" she heard a small voice cry, "You're lucky Shamabus isn't home. But he's not going to be happy having to build it all over again."

Tabitha looked to the right, to the left and behind her, trying to figure out where the voice was coming from. "Who said that? Where are you?" she asked.

"Down here, ya big oaf!"

Tabitha looked down at the ground and noticed that all of the branches and leaves that she assumed had just been scattered across the clearing were, in fact, arranged into cute little homes. Then, right next to her left foot, this little man, smaller than her foot was wide, was scowling up at her. His neon yellow hair and long beard to match seemed to glow in the sunlight.

"What don't you watch where you're going? Somebody could get hurt," the man said.

Tabitha bent down to get a closer look and her mouth opened in wonder.

"Amazing!" she remarked. "What a funny little thing you are!"

The man huffed. "Better a funny little thing than a funny big thing, I'd say. What kind of a hair colour is that? Brown. Branches are brown, The earth is brown. But brown hair? Ridiculous!"

Tabitha was too awed by the little man to realize she was being insulted.

"I didn't know there were people as small as you. Sure, I've heard stories about fairies but I know they aren't real. And besides, you don't have any wings so you couldn't be a fairy anyway."

The little man thought for a moment then shook his head. "Never heard of those fairy things but I assure you we Grenigots are very real."

"Grenigots? Is that what you're called?"

"Yesiree. Name's Marticus."

"Hi. My name is - "

"Don't care. Now, what are you going around stepping on people's houses for?"

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. I was just thinking and wasn't paying attention to where I was going."

"A dangerous activity, that thinking. I'd advise against it. It can get you into a lot of trouble."

Just then, this other little man with vibrant purple hair and a cherry red jacket came up to Marticus and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Hey, Marticus, why are you talking to a tree?" he wondered.

Tabitha looked down, realized she was wearing a green dress that might indeed cause her to be mistaken for a tree by a being of his size, and laughed. As she lifted her head back in the middle of a chuckle, her eyes glanced further into the clearing and she could see many more little people like this Marticus and his friend doing all sorts of things – playing, working. Some young people at the far end of the clearing were even dancing and making music. She was stunned.

Marticus flung his arm at the other man in annoyance. "It's not a tree, Bornoden. It's one of them girl things. We've had them around here before. This one stepped on Shamabus's house."

"Gosh and golly, he's going to be steamed." Bornoden declared, shaking his head. "I guess we'll be spending tomorrow helping him put it back together. He can stay at my place for the night. Well, anyway, I'm supposed to tell you that Merrylynn has been looking for you. Your supper's on the table and it's getting cold."

Marticus looked up at the sun and, from its position in the sky, agreed it was probably dinnertime. "I guess it's about that time. I did do a lot of work today and I do have the grumbles. Do you know what she's cooking?"

"Looked like a couple of beetles and a mushroom."

Tabitha scrunched up her nose. "Ewww! Beetles! Gross!"

Marticus put his hands on his hips. "They just so happen to be my favourite, I'll have you know. And it's not like you're invited to dinner so you don't have to eat them. Not that there would be enough to fill your enormous gut anyway."

Now, Tabitha knew she was being insulted. "Well, I just had a big dinner anyway so I couldn't eat another thing. Certainly not a beetle."

Bornoden patted his stomach and licked his lips. "I can always eat more. If I had anything to say about it I would never stop."

Tabitha giggled. Her father loved to eat too and, in some ways, Bornoden reminded her of him. Her father even had a bright red jacket

himself that he loved to wear. In fact, he had been wearing it at Caitlyn's party.

Caitlyn's party. Tabitha wondered what they were doing at that moment. Had they finished the cake? Were they playing more games? Were they talking about her and how selfish she had been? Had she really been selfish for simply choosing not to do something she didn't want to do?

Just as Tabitha was beginning to get sad and angry again, thinking about what she should have done and whether she was right or wrong, the music from across the clearing grew louder and the dancers began to hoot and holler. It grabbed her attention.

"Why are those people dancing over there?" she asked with her mind back on the situation at hand. "We don't usually dance in the middle of the streets where I'm from."

A young girl about Tabitha's age with neon pink hair and wearing a purple polka dot dress skipped up to them. She stopped and smiled up at Tabitha.

"Oh, they're practicing for our annual Fronkernic festival. There's always a big show." She tugged on Bornoden's sleeve. "Daddy, I got all my lines right today for the first time!"

Bornoden patted the girl on her head. "My daughter, Kishinae. She's performing in a play for the festival." He gave Kishinae a big grin. "That's great, honey."

Tabitha reached out a finger for the little girl to shake. "Nice to meet you, Kishinae. So, what's this Fronkernic festival?"

Bornoden began to get excited. He loved telling stories. "Fronkernic is the time when we celebrate our ancestors first arriving in Grenotia." His eyes grew as big as saucers and his hands began to act out the tale. "They had been wandering for generations, facing incredible dangers in their search for a place to call home. Many lost their lives being crushed by falling tree branches or attacked by vicious animals like the squibbers with their long sharp claws and those horrible meowing sounds."

Kishinae gasped in fear. She had only seen one squibber in her life and it was terrifying.

But Tabitha wasn't scared at all. "Oh, you mean cats." she corrected. "I think they're cute. I want one but my dad is allergic to them." But then she imagined herself the size of a Grenigot and felt bad. "I suppose they would seem much bigger and scarier to you though."

Marticus glared at Tabitha, furious. "The squibbers were far from cute! My family line was almost erased by them. I am lucky to be alive. Why you -"

"Anyway," interrupted Bornoden, "after years of travelling they came upon this clearing and they knew it was the perfect spot. They could build a community and the space was wide open so they could easily spot the squibbers and anything else that came along."

All of a sudden, an even littler little person with peacock blue hair dashed by, arms flailing wildly in panic. "They're coming! They're coming! Save yourself! Find shelter now!" he screamed.

"What's coming?" Tabitha asked. "The cats, I mean, the squibbers?"

Bornoden looked towards the western sky, worried.

"No. Worse. The nados. They show up when the weather gets hot. We have lost so many of our people because of them, my dear wife, Kishinae's mother included. She was swept up and never heard from again." He held his daughter close to him but didn't want to make her anymore afraid than she already was.

"That would be awful to lose your mother." Tabitha thought. She didn't even want to think of what that would be like. She could see white, black and red funnel clouds, about ten of them, appearing out of the trees, blowing into the clearing and heading towards the village. They were spinning with tremendous speed and, while they didn't reach any higher than Tabitha's waist, she could see how dangerous they would be for the tiny Grenigots.


"We get things like that where I'm from but not a whole bunch at a time." she remarked.

Marticus gasped and leaped straight up in the air without any warning. "Merrylynn! I have to reach Merrylynn!"

He turned to run but Bornoden grabbed his arm. "It's too far and too dangerous to go all the way across the village. The nados are already here. We have to find a safe place and hope for the best for our families."

Tabitha thought for a moment, then realized she was wearing the perfect hiding spot. "I'm big enough so the nados can't hurt me. You can hide in my pockets. You should be safe there."

Tabitha picked up Marticus, Bornoden and Kishinae and placed them in the front pocket of her green dress. The two men poked their heads out just above the fabric so they could still tell what was happening.



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