

The cover features a decorative border of various leaves and grasses. The top border consists of several different leaf shapes, some with prominent veins, in shades of purple, blue, and green. The bottom border is a dense field of tall, thin grasses in similar colors. The central text is set against a plain white background.

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 grumblies. 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?