

El hechicero enano de UXMAL



Narrado por SUSAN HAND SHETTERLY
Ilustrado por ROBERT SHETTERLY

Dedicado a Birdie y a Pop por su amabilidad y coraje.

Nuestro agradecimiento a Janet y a George Cobb de Tikul, Yucatán, que leyeron el texto para nosotros y compartieron su riqueza en conocimiento sobre su hogar adoptivo.

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To Birdie and Pop for their kindness and encouragement

Our thanks to Janet and George Cobb of Tikul, Yucatan, who read the text for us and shared their wealth of knowledge about their adopted homeland.

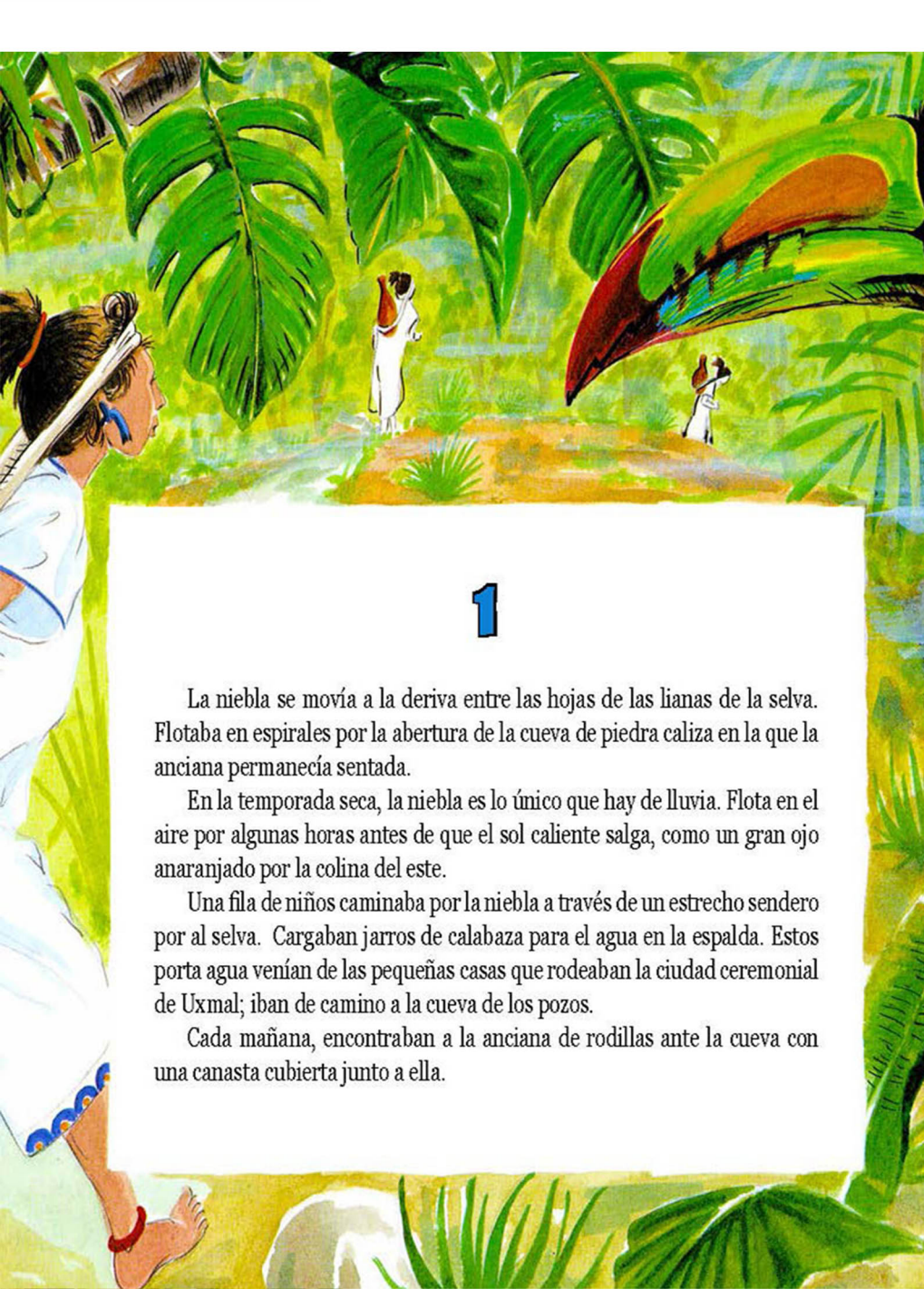
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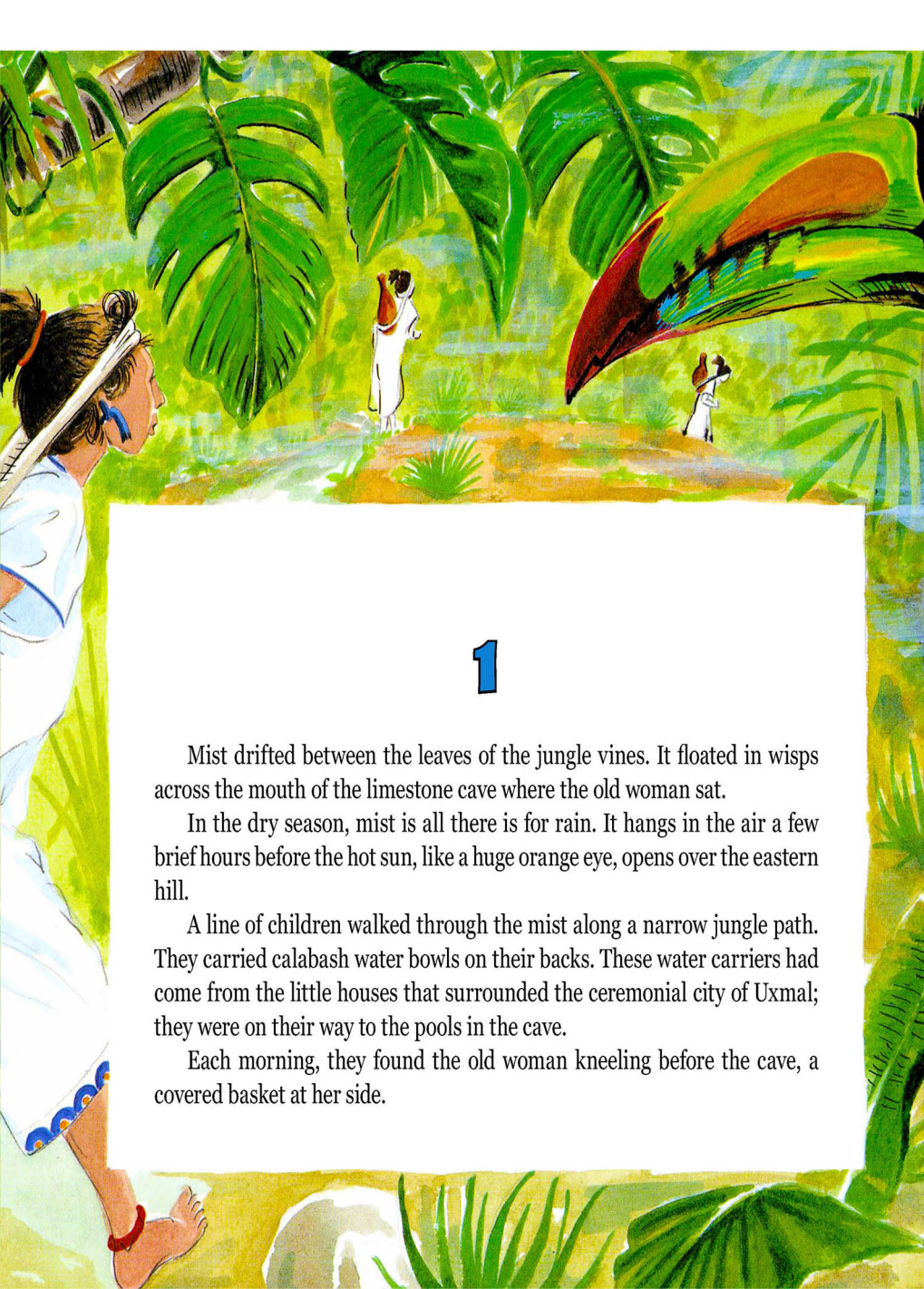


1

La niebla se movía a la deriva entre las hojas de las lianas de la selva. Flotaba en espirales por la abertura de la cueva de piedra caliza en la que la anciana permanecía sentada.

En la temporada seca, la niebla es lo único que hay de lluvia. Flota en el aire por algunas horas antes de que el sol caliente salga, como un gran ojo anaranjado por la colina del este.

Una fila de niños caminaba por la niebla a través de un estrecho sendero por la selva. Cargaban jarros de calabaza por el agua en la espalda. Estos porta agua venían de las pequeñas casas que rodeaban la ciudad ceremonial de Uxmal; iban de camino a la anciana de rodillas ante la cueva con una canasta cubierta junto a ella.



1

Mist drifted between the leaves of the jungle vines. It floated in wisps across the mouth of the limestone cave where the old woman sat.

In the dry season, mist is all there is for rain. It hangs in the air a few brief hours before the hot sun, like a huge orange eye, opens over the eastern hill.

A line of children walked through the mist along a narrow jungle path. They carried calabash water bowls on their backs. These water carriers had come from the little houses that surrounded the ceremonial city of Uxmal; they were on their way to the pools in the cave.

Each morning, they found the old woman kneeling before the cave, a covered basket at her side.



Ella tendía su mano. Con una voz áspera como las hojas de maíz al viento, gritaba, "¡Un huevo! ¡Dame un huevo y te mostraré a Tzab-Can!" Desde adentro de la canasta se escuchaba un ruido apagado, como gotas de lluvia golpeando las hojas secas de la selva.

"No queremos verlo", decían algunos de los porta agua refunfuñando.

"¡Escuchen!" La anciana inclinaba la cabeza. "¡Canta con su cola!" Resopló una risa de ave vieja.

Luego, como lo hacían siempre, el primero de los porta agua sacaba lentamente un huevo del bolsillo y lo colocaba en la palma brillante de la anciana. Los niños se amontonaban sobre la anciana que le susurraba algo a la canasta.

Un duro y vil traqueteo salía de ella. La anciana quitaba la tapa y una lengua negra se asomaba por el borde de la canasta.

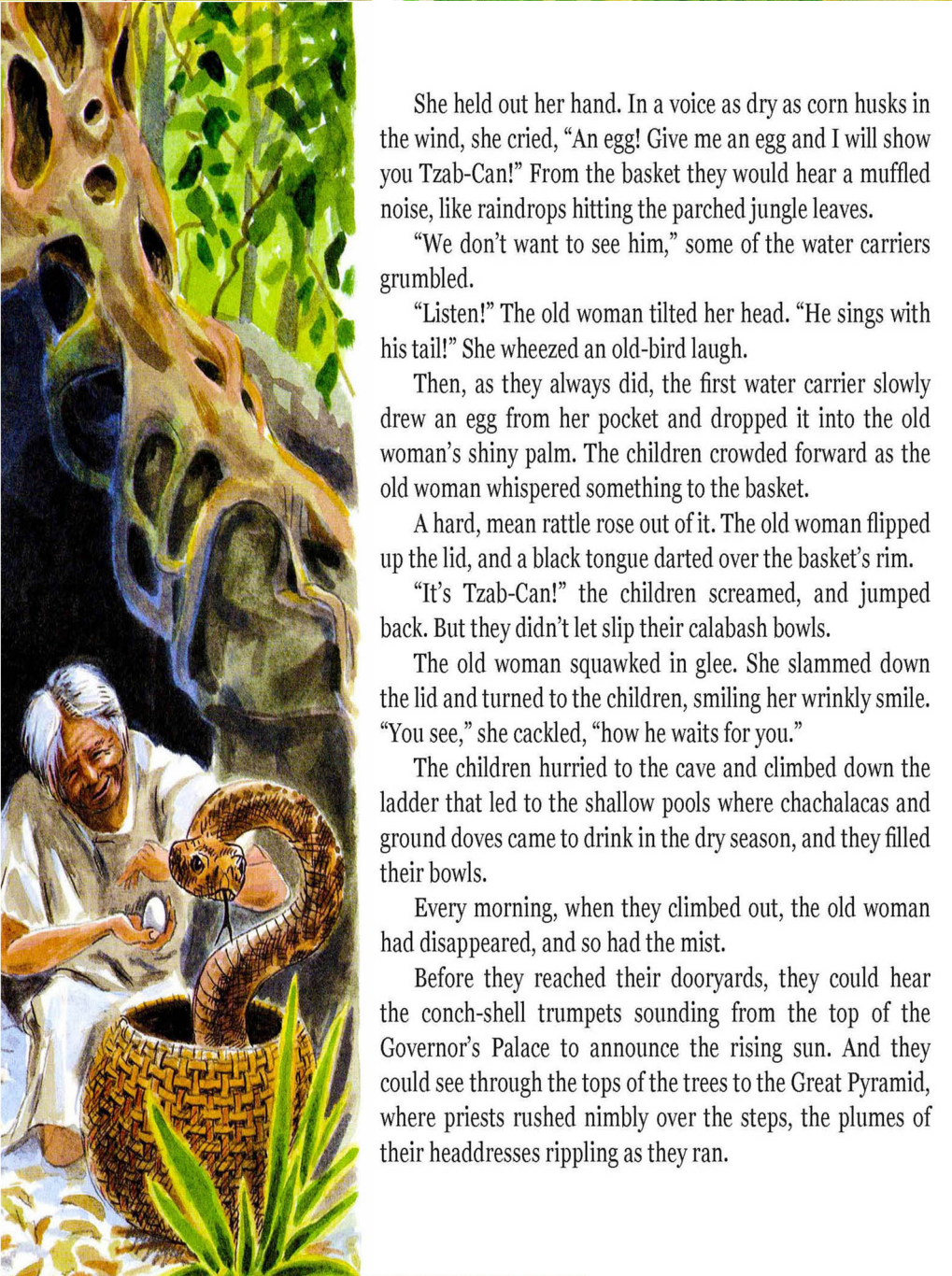
"¡Es Tzab-Can!", gritaban los niños y daban un salto atrás. Pero sin dejar que sus jarros de calabaza cayeran.

La anciana graznaba de júbilo. Colocaba con rapidez la tapa y se dirigía a los niños sonriéndoles con su cara arrugada. "Ven", se reía, "como ella los espera."

Los niños corrían a la cueva, bajaban por la escalera y llenaban sus jarros en los pozos pandos en los que los chachalacas y las palomas de tierra venían a beber en la temporada seca.

Cada mañana, cuando trepaban para salir la anciana había desaparecido junto con la niebla.

Antes de que llegaran a los jardines de sus casas, podían escuchar el llamado de caracolas resonando desde la cima del palacio del Gobernador anunciando la salida del sol. Y podían ver sobre las copas de los árboles la cima de la Gran Pirámide por cuyas escalinatas los sacerdotes se apresuraban con agilidad mientras los penachos de sus tocados ondulaban al correr.



She held out her hand. In a voice as dry as corn husks in the wind, she cried, "An egg! Give me an egg and I will show you Tzab-Can!" From the basket they would hear a muffled noise, like raindrops hitting the parched jungle leaves.

"We don't want to see him," some of the water carriers grumbled.

"Listen!" The old woman tilted her head. "He sings with his tail!" She wheezed an old-bird laugh.

Then, as they always did, the first water carrier slowly drew an egg from her pocket and dropped it into the old woman's shiny palm. The children crowded forward as the old woman whispered something to the basket.

A hard, mean rattle rose out of it. The old woman flipped up the lid, and a black tongue darted over the basket's rim.

"It's Tzab-Can!" the children screamed, and jumped back. But they didn't let slip their calabash bowls.

The old woman squawked in glee. She slammed down the lid and turned to the children, smiling her wrinkly smile. "You see," she cackled, "how he waits for you."

The children hurried to the cave and climbed down the ladder that led to the shallow pools where chachalacas and ground doves came to drink in the dry season, and they filled their bowls.

Every morning, when they climbed out, the old woman had disappeared, and so had the mist.

Before they reached their dooryards, they could hear the conch-shell trumpets sounding from the top of the Governor's Palace to announce the rising sun. And they could see through the tops of the trees to the Great Pyramid, where priests rushed nimbly over the steps, the plumes of their headdresses rippling as they ran.



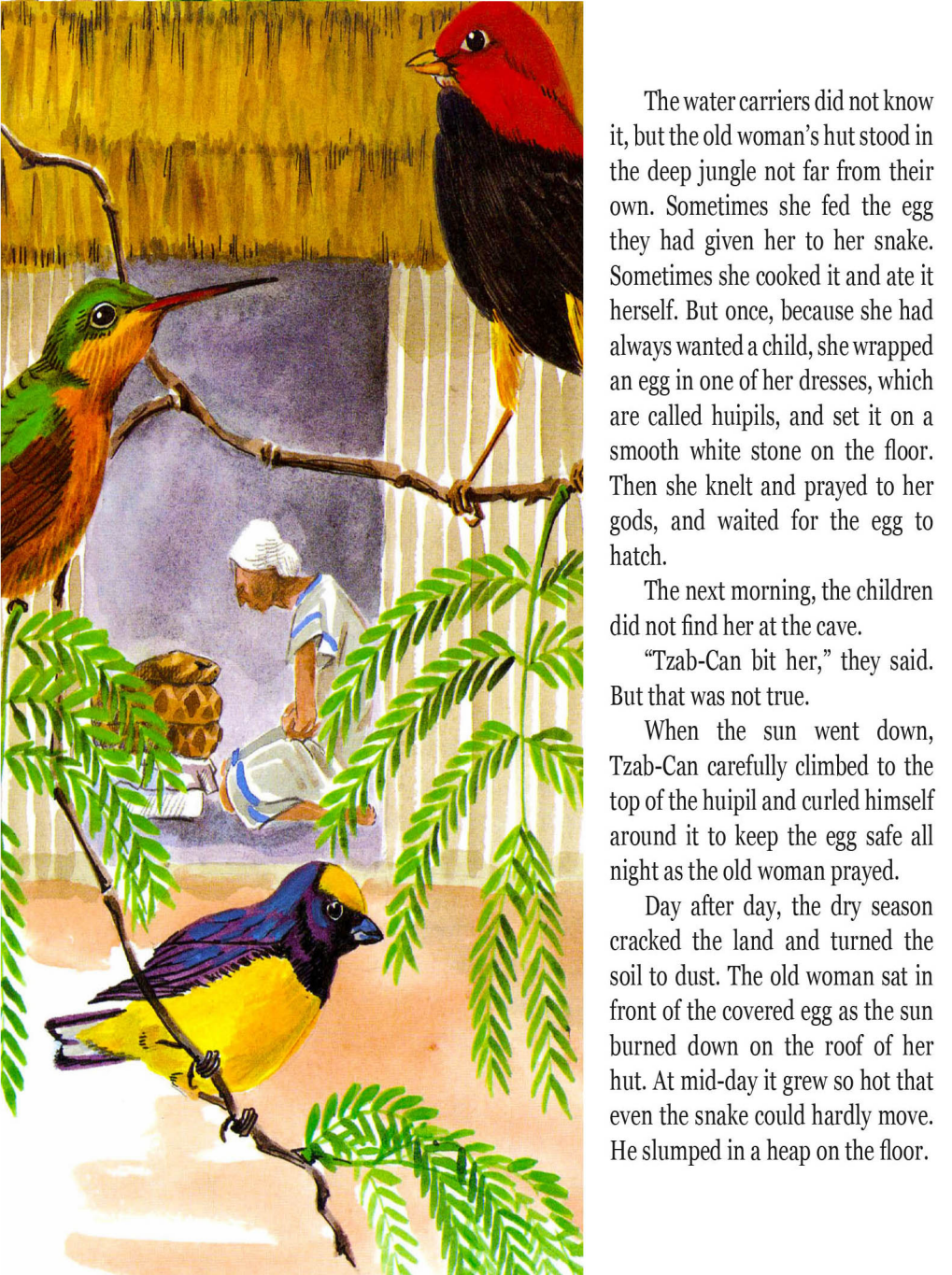
Los porta agua no sabían, pero la choza de la anciana se situaba en la profundidad de la selva lejos de las suyas. A veces alimentaba a su serpiente con el huevo que le daba. A veces lo cocinaba y se lo comía ella. Pero una vez, porque ella siempre había querido un hijo, envolvió un huevo con uno de sus vestidos, llamados huipil, y lo colocó sobre una roca suave y lisa en el suelo. Luego se arrodilló, rezó a sus dioses y esperó a que el huevo naciera.

Ala mañana siguiente, los niños no la encontraron en la cueva.

"Tzab-Can la mordió", dijeron. Pero eso no era cierto.

Cuando el sol bajó, Tzab-Can subió con cuidado sobre el huipil y se enroscó alrededor del huevo para mantenerlo a salvo toda la noche mientras la anciana rezaba.

Día tras día, la temporada seca agrietaba el suelo y volvía polvo a la tierra. La anciana siguió sentada frente al huevo cubierto mientras el sol quemaba el techo de la choza. Al medio día se ponía tan caliente que la serpiente apenas se podía mover. Se dejaba caer de golpe al suelo.



The water carriers did not know it, but the old woman's hut stood in the deep jungle not far from their own. Sometimes she fed the egg they had given her to her snake. Sometimes she cooked it and ate it herself. But once, because she had always wanted a child, she wrapped an egg in one of her dresses, which are called huipils, and set it on a smooth white stone on the floor. Then she knelt and prayed to her gods, and waited for the egg to hatch.

The next morning, the children did not find her at the cave.

"Tzab-Can bit her," they said. But that was not true.

When the sun went down, Tzab-Can carefully climbed to the top of the huipil and curled himself around it to keep the egg safe all night as the old woman prayed.

Day after day, the dry season cracked the land and turned the soil to dust. The old woman sat in front of the covered egg as the sun burned down on the roof of her hut. At mid-day it grew so hot that even the snake could hardly move. He slumped in a heap on the floor.

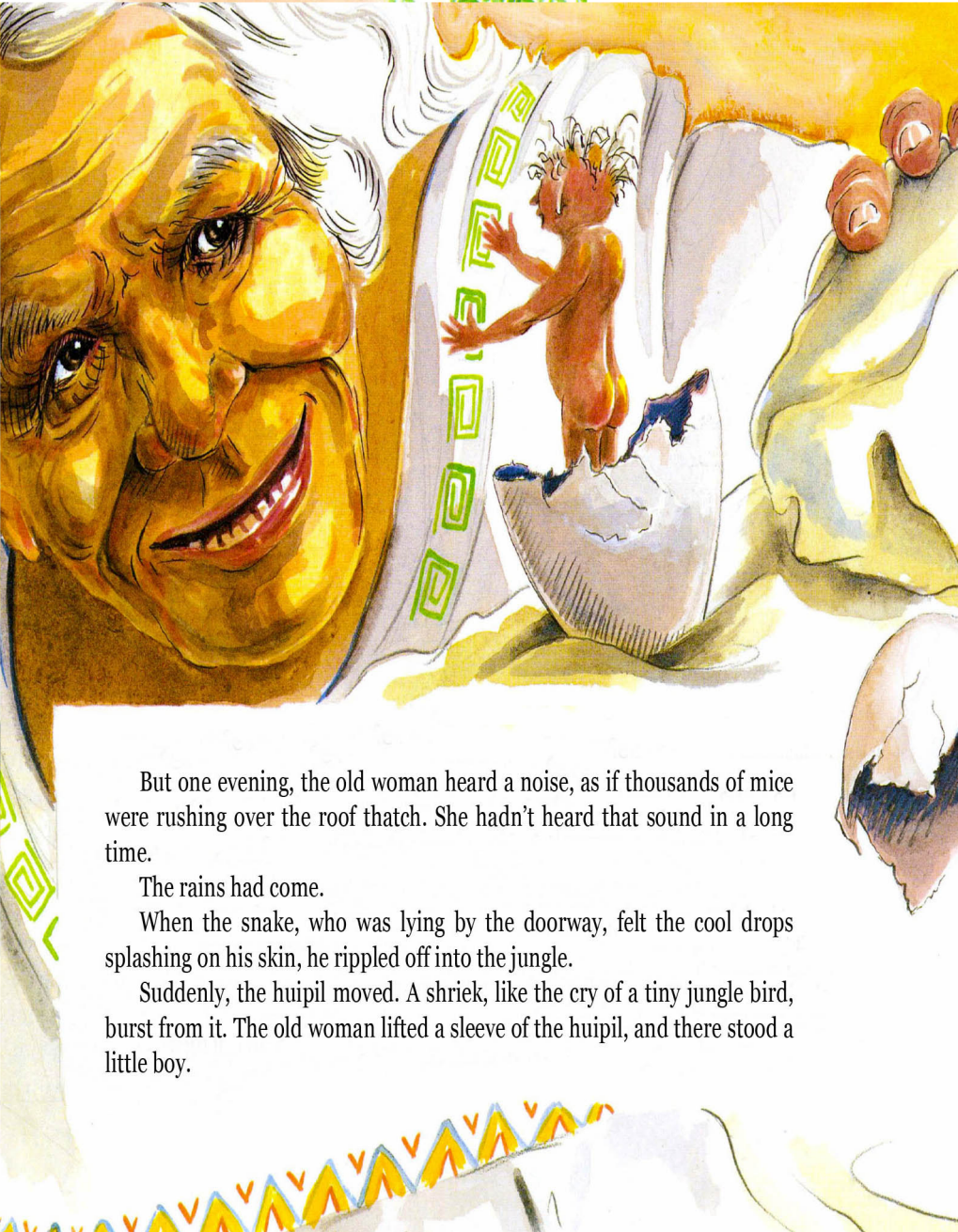


Pero una noche, la anciana escuchó un ruido, como si miles de ratones se colaran por entre el techo de paja. No había escuchado ese sonido en mucho tiempo.

Llegaron las lluvias.

Cuando la anciana, que reposaba junto a la entrada, sintió el salpicar en su piel, se adentró ondulando entre la selva.

De repente, el huipil se movió. Un chillido, como el llanto de una diminuta ave de la selva, salió de él. La anciana levantó una manga de la cual y allí estaba el pequeño niño.



But one evening, the old woman heard a noise, as if thousands of mice were rushing over the roof thatch. She hadn't heard that sound in a long time.

The rains had come.

When the snake, who was lying by the doorway, felt the cool drops splashing on his skin, he rippled off into the jungle.

Suddenly, the huipil moved. A shriek, like the cry of a tiny jungle bird, burst from it. The old woman lifted a sleeve of the huipil, and there stood a little boy.



"¡Mis oraciones fueron escuchadas!", gritó la anciana. El niño más hermoso que jamás hubiera visto.

Lo alimentó con miel de una colmena de abejas mayas sin aguijón y tortillas de maíz que cocinaba en una piedra sobre el fuego. Le dio frijoles, chayote y papayas que ella cultivaba en su milpa o parcela. Pero no creció más que un pequeño cerviño de la selva. Sólo envejecía.

El pequeño vio a los niños de Uxmal cuando caminaban por el sendero de la selva hacia la cueva. Él se escondió detrás del tronco de una ceiba y los observaba reírse juntos mientras cargaban sus jarros de calabaza. Vio que ellos no eran como él. Y les tenía miedo.

Después de un rato la anciana le quitaba la tapa de la canasta.

El día en el que atardeció en la milpa, la anciana le habló con gentileza. "Hijo mío, eres Tol, el hechicero enano. Un día gobernarás la grandiosa ciudad de Uxmal."

"Pero a mí me gusta aquí", gimió. "¡Me gusta estar aquí con Tzab-Can y contigo!" El corrió a la choza y se arrojó en la hamaca y le dio la espalda.

Diligentemente, marchó solo por el sendero a la ciudad. La anciana lo vio ir.

Había garrapateros asustados en silencio delante de él, posados en las ramas de los viejos árboles amarillos florecientes. Al llegar al Palacio del Gobernador, una iguana pasó rozando las escalinatas y se sumergió en un lago. Tol comenzó a subir. Subió hasta llegar a la gran terraza de piedra desde donde se admiraban las colinas Puc. Ante él, vestidos con piel de jaguar y sosteniendo lanzas de obsidiana, había cinco guardias de amplio torso. Usaban dientes de tiburón, uñas de jaguar y cuerdas de colores brillantes colgando de sus cuellos. Plumas de tucán brillaban en su pelo. Vieron al pequeño Tol y se rieron.

"¡Lárgate, zancudo!", bramó uno de los guardias.

"No soy un zancudo", replicó Tol, con los sentimientos heridos. "Amablemente tejen saber al gobernador que el hechicero enano ha llegado."

Por un instante, Tol pensó que los guardias se veían asustados. Pero comenzaron a reír de nuevo. Y mientras reían, sus plumas temblaron, los dientes de tiburón castañearon y las largas uñas curvadas traquetearon contra las cuerdas.

"My prayers are answered!" the old woman cried. He was the finest little boy she had ever seen.

She fed him wild honey from the hives of the stingless Mayan bees, and corn tortillas that she cooked on a stone over the open fire. She fed him beans and chayote squash and papayas that she harvested from her milpa plot. But he grew no taller than the little jungle deer. He just grew older.

The boy saw the children of Uxmal as they walked the jungle path to the cave. He would hide behind the trunk of a ceiba tree and watch them laughing together as they lugged their calabash bowls. He saw that they did not look the same as he did. And he was afraid of them.

The boy played with his friend the snake during the dry seasons. When the rains fell, he and the old woman worked until dark in the milpa.

On the day of his fifteenth year, the dwarf wizard spoke gently to him. "My son, you are Tol, the old woman's. One day you shall rule the great city of Uxmal."

"But I like it here," he whimpered. "I like it with Tzab-Can and you!" He ran into the hut and wrapped himself up in his hammock and turned his back on her.

After a time the old woman spoke to him again. "Tomorrow you will go to the governor. I will tell you what to say."

That night Tol could not sleep. He watched the lamp that she had set in the center of the floor. Its flame flickered in the darkness.

A small, round owl landed on his hammock strings. It leaned forward.

"Don't be frightened!" the owl whistled in his ear.

The bird flew, brushing across his face. It snuffed the flame of the lamp as it fell. Tol sighed a deep sigh. He curled into his hammock and fell asleep.



"Tell the governor," the old woman said, holding on to Tol's thin shoulders and looking sternly into his eyes, "that you have come to lead the people. That you are the dwarf-wizard. He will understand."

Tol raised his hands and nervously tried to press the strands of his hair down flat. But they popped up again, like the feathers on the head of a hawk eagle.

Dutifully, he marched down the path to the city. The old woman watched him go.

Groove-billed anis scattered around the eaves of trees, drifting off the branches of the flowering yellow elder trees. As he reached the Governor's Palace, an iguana skittered over the steps and flipped down a hole. Tol began to climb. Up he went until he stood on the wide stone terrace that overlooked the Puc Palace. Before him, dressed in jaguar skins and holding spears made of obsidian, stood five broad-chested guards. They wore shark teeth and jaguar claws and brightly colored beads in ropes around their necks. Toucan feathers glistened in their hair. They looked down at Tol and they laughed.

"Get away, mosquito!" one of the guards bellowed.

"I am not a mosquito!" retorted Tol, his feelings stung.

"Kindly tell the governor the dwarf-wizard is here."

Briefly, Tol thought that the guards looked frightened. But they began to laugh again. And as they laughed, their feathers trembled and their shark teeth chattered and the long, curved claws rattled against the beads.

Tol walked past them into the palace, where the governor sat on his two-headed jaguar throne. The governor was asleep. He was snoring. A fly had landed on his nose and was casually cleaning its wings.



"Dile al gobernador", dijo la anciana, sosteniendo a Tol de sus diminutos hombros mirándolo con severidad a los ojos, "que tú has venido a guiar al pueblo. Que tú eres el hechicero enano. Él lo entenderá."

Tol levantó sus manos y trató nerviosamente de alisarse las hebras de su pelo. Pero se levantaban de nuevo como las plumas en la cabeza de un águila.

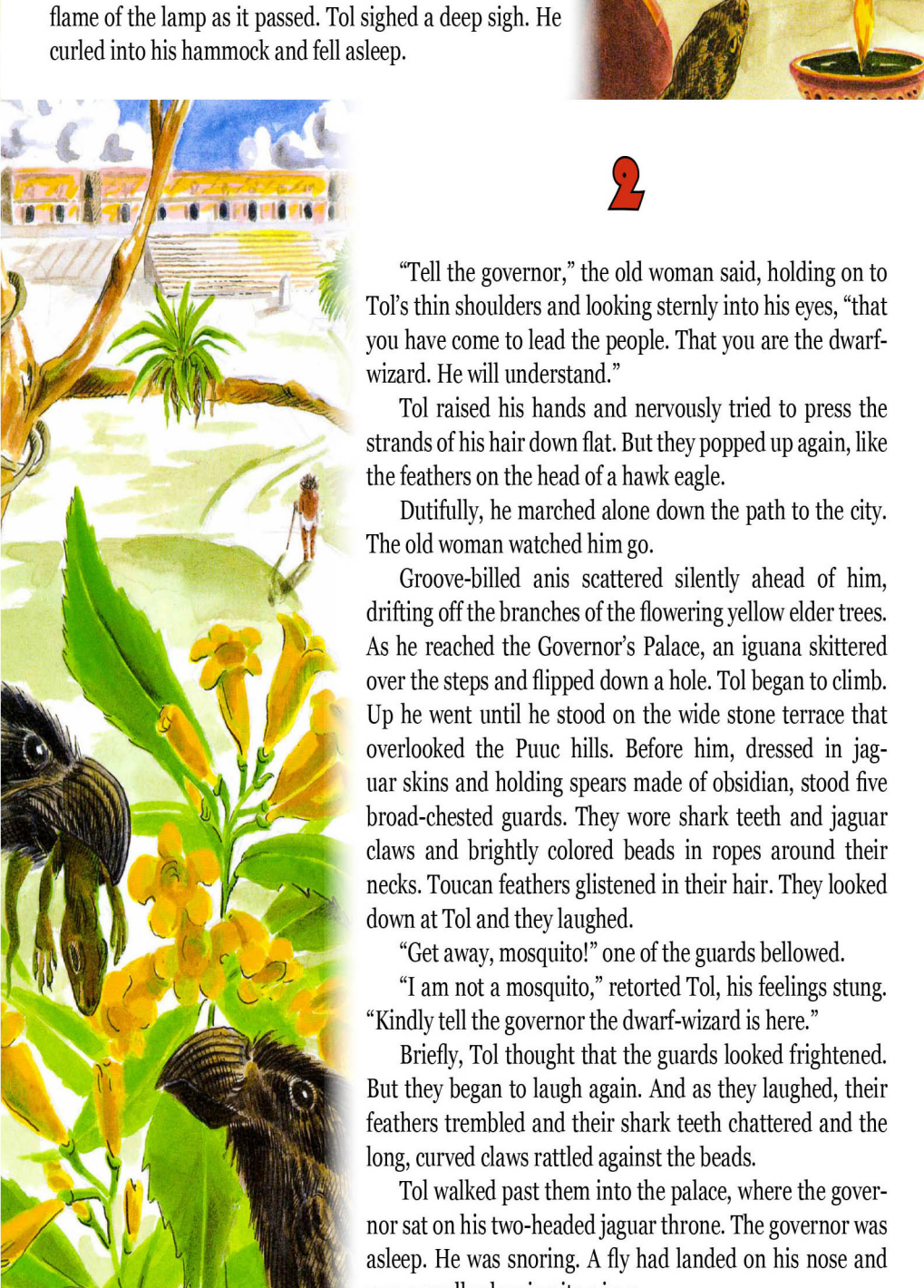
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