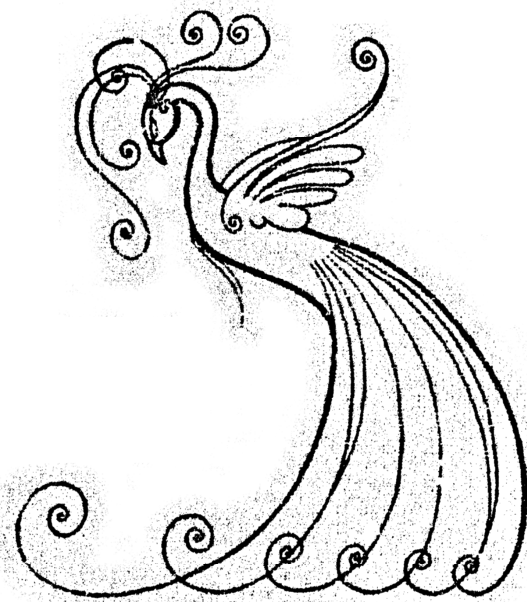


Birds Were Different Then



Engracia de Rosado

AUTHOR'S NOTE

These legends about the beginnings of birds were written to satisfy my own curiosity.

When life had just begun, according to Mayan records, birds were not as they are today. The Peacock was drab and homely, the Nightingale could not sing, and the Blackbird was as white as the crest of a wave. All feathered folk in the land of Mayab were different then.

But somehow, over the years, great changes took place among all living things. The Peacock found a gorgeous robe, the Nightingale mastered its wonderful trills and the Blackbird went into deep mourning. Still others altered their looks or habits until they became like the birds of today.

I wanted to know how and why these changes took place. The printed Mayan legends to which I had access in Spanish gave me few hints and little help. They dealt generally with trees and rocks and Akals and birds and animals and gods and humans. So I set myself the task of answering my own questions.

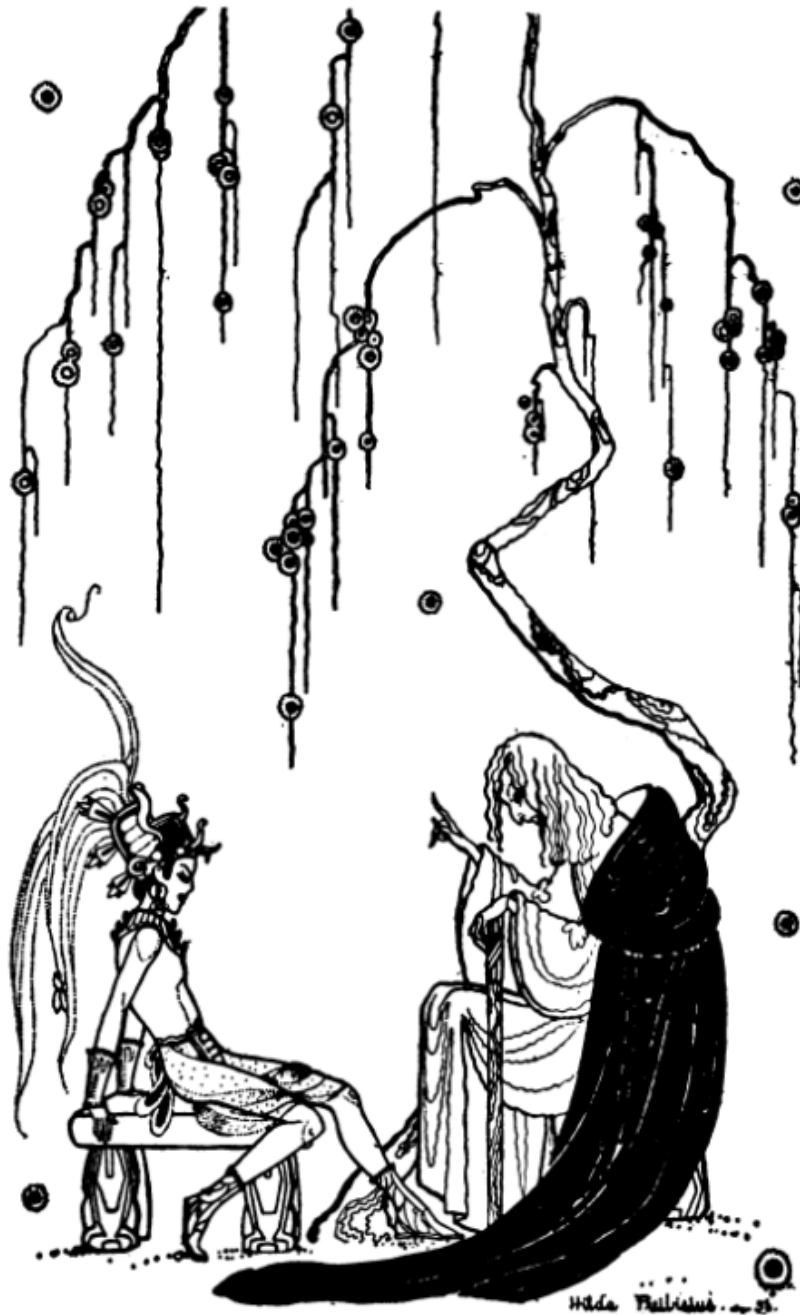
Mr. Luis Rosado Vega, poet laureate and Yucatecan writer, offered me much valuable source material. He had preserved the legends from Mayan records and from very old people whom he had met through the services as organizer and director of the Historical and Archaeological Museum in Mérida, Yucatan.

Birds of long ago, these legends would have you believe, were much like humans. They were good and they were bad, they were modest and they were vain, honest and false, with all the virtues and vices of real people. It followed, therefore, that the changes must have come as rewards or punishments from the gods, or perhaps as a result of loves and hatreds of neighbors in the feathered kingdom.

Here was something upon which to build. The records also made mention of a little Mayan prince and of an Old Woman of Mani who claimed to have been on earth since life began. Whether she actually told stories to him does not matter. I have her do so in this book, and I make her relate my legends about how and why the changes in birds took place.

These explanations of what happened to the feathered folk in the land of Mayab satisfy my own curiosity. I hope they do yours.

Engracia de Rosado



*Under a bower of fragrant jasmine, the Old Woman of
Mani related her stories to the little Mayan prince.*

Artwork by Hilda Preibisius

THE LEGEND OF
HOW THE PEACOCK
BORROWED HIS FEATHERS

Deep in the land of Mayab lived a little prince named Na Dzul. He lived in a beautiful palace in the ancient city of Chi Cheen Itza. He was nine years old and a well behaved little prince. Every afternoon when the leaves on the tall trees began to sway with the cool and playful breeze, his nurse, a noble lady by birth, used to take him on her lap and tell him stories.

Not far from the palace, yet way into the woods lived an old woman named X-Nuc Mani which in the language of the Mayans means "Old Woman of Mani." She seemed to know all that there was to know; and from leagues around people came to hear her tell stories of the beginning of all things, for she claimed to have been on earth when life first began.

One afternoon Na Dzul and his nurse strolled out of the royal grounds and into the forest where the Old Woman of Mani lived. It was a very hot day. X-Nuc Mani was sitting at the door of her palm-roofed little hut, and her long, thin fingers were combing white hair that fell in a mantle over shoulders bent with age.

With the aid of a cane, X-Nuc Mani rose to greet the prince and the noble lady, his nurse. X-Nuc Mani had known Na Dzul since he was a babe in arms. She knew also of his love for stories, and offered to tell him one if he would promise to stay quiet for a few minutes.

Na Dzul was a very polite little boy. He thanked the old woman and sat quite still under a giant ceiba tree. The noble lady and X-Nuc Mani brought small wooden stools and sat close to the little prince. Then, in a low, clear voice, X-Nuc Mani began to speak.

O Gracious Prince, [the Old Woman of Mani told the story] as you must know, the birds have not always been as they are today. Long, long ago the Great Spirit grew tired of the constant quarreling among them, and decided to call a meeting to select one worthy to rule over the others.

Each of the birds, in his great conceit, thought that he should be ruler, and each tried to show the others why he should be the one chosen.

"There is no doubt but that the one with the sweetest voice will be selected," said X-Kokol Che, the Nightingale. And stretching her fat little throat, she tried out her most difficult trills.

"It is plain to be seen," said Cutz, the Wild Turkey, "that the choice should fall on the strongest. To keep the quarrelsome ones in order, a strong hand is needed. And there is no one to surpass me." So, spreading his wide wings from his perch up in a tree, he broke a twig with one powerful stroke.

"No one is better fitted to be ruler than I," said Chac Dzibdzib, the Cardinal. "Just look and see." And gliding past the others, she displayed her royal robe of scarlet-colored plumage.

So, too, the others in turn showed their good points before their admiring friends.

Dzul Cutz, the Peacock, who had been patiently listening, did not

open his mouth. He was very ambitious. He was proud of his shapely body, but he was also aware of his scrawny and dirty-looking feathers, for he was not as he is today.

“Oh, no,” he sighed, “I could never be selected as I am. But if I could borrow a suit somewhere--” He thought for a while and then flew over to his friend Puhuy, the Road Runner.

“I have come to make a bargain with you, my dear Puhuy,” Dzul Cutz, the Peacock, said in a wheedling tone. “Your feathers are beautiful, but don't you think that you are too small to be the king of the birds? I fear you lack the grace and elegance I have. I cannot give you my body, But you can lend me your feathers just for the occasion. For this small favor.” he added, “I will share the wealth and honors of my kingdom with you.”

Puhuy was silent for a while. He thought of the glory of being close to the king, but he was not sure he cared to disrobe himself.

The Peacock pleaded his cause again and assured Puhuy of the honesty of his intentions. And at last Puhuy, completely won over by the tempting offer, accepted the bargain.

One by one Puhuy plucked his colorful feathers. Slowly the Peacock adjusted them to his shapely body. The feathers grew and multiplied on him. Soon the Peacock was arrayed in a gorgeous robe with a long, train, in which gleamed the lapis lazuli of the Mayan skies, the jade of their Sacred Serpent, and the vivid tints of a tropical sunset.

Strutting, with wings slightly drooped at his sides, head high in the air, Dzul Cutz, the Peacock, entered the place where all the birds in the land of Mayab were gathered for the final selection. With his carefully scrubbed feet, he was keeping time to the martial notes of the triumphal march that poured grandly from his own slender throat.

“Ahs!” and “Ohs!” of surprise were heard from all sides. Some jealous males ruffled their feathers with anger, and it is said some hens fainted from the shock. The Great Spirit alone was pleased with the wonderful change that had made the homely Peacock a beautiful bird. He called the meeting to order, and with a loud voice that could be heard everywhere made the Peacock “King of the Birds.”

X-Nuc Mani stopped for a moment and glanced at the little prince. During her story he had not taken his eyes from her face.

“And -- did the Peacock return the feathers?” asked the boy prince with increasing curiosity.

“Ah!” The Old Woman of Mani opened wide her wrinkled mouth. “So you want to know? Well, I shall tell you.”

No, O Gracious Prince, [so the story went on] the Peacock did not return the feathers. Once he found himself a king, he forgot his promise.

One day a group of old hens, noticing the absence of their friend Puhuy from the meeting, suspected a trick on the part of the Peacock. They hunted and hunted, and at last, under a bush, they discovered the poor bird, cold and almost starved to death.



*Soon the Peacock was arrayed in a gorgeous robe that
had all the vivid tints of a tropical sunset.*

Upon hearing the plight of Puhuy, their kind hearts were filled with anger. All the birds in the land of Mayab wrote a letter to the Great Spirit, asking that the Peacock be punished. So now, every time he opens his mouth, instead of his former lovely singing voice, an ugly screech comes out. And all the birds laugh and make fun of him in just penalty for his treachery.

“And how about the bird Puhuy?” asked the Prince Na Dzul.

“Ah! O Gracious Prince, that is another story,” X-Nuc Mani answered, reaching for her cane, “but if you will come again I will tell it to you.”

In token of his gratitude, Na Dzul gave the Old Woman of Mani a jade ornament. And before the sun had paled into the gray shadows of night, the prince and the noble lady, his nurse, had traveled half the distance to the palace in the ancient city of Chi Cheen Itza.

THE LEGEND OF
WHY THE ROAD RUNNER
CALLS OUT TO TRAVELERS

Na Dzul, the little Mayan prince, was a good boy all morning. He studied his lessons without protest, and his private tutors, the H-Menes, were proud of him. His nurse, the noble lady, marveled at his conduct. "Why," she said to herself, "he did not even whimper when his princely ears were scrubbed!" And then she smiled, for she remembered that they were going to visit the Old Woman of Mani that afternoon.

With another present for X-Nuc Mani safely guarded under his belt, Na Dzul and his nurse were on their way to her house long before the appointed hour.

X-Nuc Mani was sitting at the door of her little hut, smoothing her white hair with long, thin fingers. She, too, was eagerly awaiting the visit of the boy prince, and this is the story she told him:

After lending his colorful feathers to the Peacock, [the Old Woman of Mani began] Puhuy, the Road Runner, was left almost as naked as a day-old bird. He looked at himself and was almost sorry he had been so hasty. He heard other birds coming and quickly ran under the bushes.

The sun was high, but the little naked Road Runner crouched shivering in his hiding place, while the birds above were amusing themselves. Some were skipping from branch to branch, and others were chattering together or singing gaily.

"It will be only for a day or two," Dzul Cutz, the Peacock, had said. And so the little bird, thinking of his share in the bargain, waited -- waited -- waited.

Cold and hungry, Puhuy remained hidden under the bushes. And yet his faith in his friend, the Peacock, was unshaken. "He will come," he chirped, cheerfully picking a seed here and there to lessen his hunger.

But a week passed, and there was no sign of the Peacock. It seemed like a year to poor Puhuy. He was desperate. He could not go out and hunt for food, for he was ashamed to be seen by the other birds without his feathers.

As time went on, Puhuy grew tired of waiting. Under the bushes the seeds and insects became fewer and fewer. So he decided to steal out and question every human traveler that might come along.

"Puhuy? Puhuy?" he would cry, which means, "Where is he? Where is he?"

The legend tells us that in the long, long ago, when the world was young, the Mayans and the animals lived together. They spoke the same language. But the Mayans had already forgotten the language of the animals, and they could not answer him.

The poor bird was sprawled under a bush, cold and almost dead from hunger, when he was found by the kind hens early one morning. Their hearts were filled with pity and anger.

All the birds in the land of Mayab were called to witness the pitiful plight of Puhuy. Each one was asked to donate a feather to clothe the poor thing. The Nightingale, although a poor girl herself, gave several of her feathers and sang a beautiful song to cheer him up.

And this is why, O Gracious Prince, Puhuy is dressed in many colors. But he is still ashamed to wear a suit that does not belong to him. And although a long time has gone by, he keeps on watching the roads for sight of the Peacock, who tricked him out of his beautiful plumage. He runs swiftly ahead of travelers and, stopping a moment, cries in a plaintive voice, "Puhuy? Puhuy? Where is he? Where is he?" But all in vain!

X-Nuc Mani ended the story with a sigh.

"And the Nightingale, has she a story?" asked Na Dzul.

"Indeed, O Gracious Prince!" X-Nuc Mani answered, reaching for her cane. "You shall hear about her on your next visit."

Na Dzul thanked the Old Woman of Mani. On their way back to the palace a bird resembling the Peacock in body, but dressed in a poor and varied plumage, jumped in front of him and cried, "Puhuy? Puhuy? Where is he? Where is he?"

Na Dzul squeezed the hand of his nurse, the noble lady, and tears came to his eyes. But he was a Mayan, and he could not answer. The Mayans had already forgotten the language of the birds.



After lending his colorful feathers to the Peacock, the Road Runner was almost as naked as a day-old bird.

THE LEGEND OF
OF HOW THE NIGHTINGALE
LEARNED TO SING SO SWEETLY

It was the duty of Kukul Can, the Sacred Serpent, to sweep the clouds off the sky with her many colored plumes. For one week she neglected to do so, and Yum Chaac, the rain-god, taking advantage of her neglect, roamed at will, flooding everything in his path. So it was that the little Mayan prince, Na Dzul, was forced to stay indoors for many days.

As soon as the sun was shining again, Na Dzul and the noble lady, his nurse, were treading the cool, refreshed road to the forest where the Old Woman of Mani lived.

X-Nuc Mani was sunning herself at the door of her palm-thatched little hut. A welcoming smile drew up the corners of her wrinkled mouth as they approached.

“What was the story I promised to tell you, O Gracious Prince?” asked the old woman with a twinkle in her eye.

“The story of the Nightingale,” replied Na Dzul.

“Ah! So you remember?” said X-Nuc Mani. “Then I shall tell you.”

X-Kokol Che, the Nightingale, was the eldest daughter of a poor family. [Thus the Old Woman of Mani told the story.] Since early childhood she had loved to work. She kept their nest clean and tidy, taught her little sisters and brothers to fly, and even hunted tiny insects to feed the youngsters.

Her greatest desire in life was to have her voice trained, but her family could not afford the expense. So she decided to earn money by going out to work.

Nearby in a large house lived an aristocratic family. There, among the many servants, X-Kokol Che found a place doing the menial duties of the household.

This family had a daughter, Chac Dzibdzib, the Cardinal. She was beautiful but vain and empty-headed. The parents wanted their child to have a good education, just as all parents do, but she would not keep still long enough to study.

“I am rich and beautiful,” she told X-Kokol Che with a lift of her pretty, crested head. “Why should I be bothered with lessons?” And preening her brilliant scarlet feathers, she flew off to the forest to play with the other young birds of her set.

But her parents were not discouraged. Hearing that a great singing professor had recently arrived in the land of Mayab, they sent for him to teach their daughter to sing. Since no one else in their family had ever sung before, they thought it would add greatly to their standing.

Chac Dzibdzib was furious. “What?” she exclaimed, ruffling her pretty feathers. “Do I have to strain to cords of my beautiful throat to learn those difficult trills?”

Her parents begged her to take singing lessons. “No, indeed!” she

announced, stamping her slender feet upon the hard surface of her perch. Panting with anger, she flew to the forest where a flock of young friends awaited her.

X-Kokol Che, the Nightingale servant, was gathering insects for supper. She heard Chac Dzibdzib's outburst of anger before she could raise her wings to her ears.

"Oh, such talk!" she cried. "I never heard such ingratitude in all my life. And here am I, dying to have my voice trained!" Sighing deeply, she oiled her plain-looking feathers and went about her work as usual.

After much urging from her parents and flashes of hot temper on her part, young Miss Chac Dzibdzib, the Cardinal, finally agreed to take singing lessons.

After that, early each morning just before daybreak, X-Kokol Che, the Nightingale, would hurry through her work in the kitchen. Then she would hide in the thick foliage of a ceiba tree to listen to every note and trill as the professor taught the daughter of to house the difficult art of singing.

It was not long before the professor was ready to give up the lessons, because Chac Dzibdzib was not paying any attention to them. But the thought of her fond parents kept him at the hopeless task.

All this time, from her hiding place, the Nightingale servant had not missed hearing a single lesson. Every afternoon when her chores were done, she flew deep into the forest. There, in solitude, she practiced the trills until she learned them by heart. At last the poor bird had attained her greatest desire in life.

Spring was almost over. The parents of Chac Dzibdzib were eager to hear their daughter sing. So, without consulting the professor or Chac Dzibdzib herself, they arranged to present her in a concert.

The professor was frantic. What could he do? Tell the proud parents that their daughter had not learned enough to sing in public? Impossible! They would not believe it!

With wings drooping hopelessly at his sides, the professor was hopping nervously from branch to branch, when Chac Dzibdzib came to her lesson that day, late as usual. He was ready to tell the truth to her parents, but Chac Dzibdzib would not hear of it. She was vain and lazy but deep in her heart she had great regard for their feelings.

"Wait!" she pleaded. "Oh, wait! I must think of something to help us."

She flew deep into the forest, looking for a place where she could be alone, to think what to do about the concert.

Suddenly sweet and melodious singing reached her ears. Chac Dzibdzib was breathless. She looked about her, but she could see no one. She looked again, and there in a secluded spot, forgetting the whole world, the homeliest of the bird family was singing, singing, as Chac Dzibdzib had never heard any bird sing before.

At first Chac Dzibdzib was angry. "What!" she shouted, flapping her wings. "She! The humblest of my servants!" Chac Dzibdzib was ready to fly

and peck at her, but she controlled herself. An idea entered her pretty head. She could use X-Kokol Che to sing for her at the concert.

“Bravo!” said Chac Dzibdzib, swallowing her pride, “Bravo! You have a marvelous voice.” And passing a wing over X-Kokol Che's quivering back, she promised to be kind to the Nightingale servant in the future.

Later, Chac Dzibdzib explained her plan to the professor and he was forced to agree.

The date of the concert arrived. A large crowd was eagerly waiting to hear the rich, aristocratic daughter of the Cardinal sing.

A giant tree, well branched, had been selected as a stage for the performance. Hidden in the thick foliage, X-Kokol Che, the Nightingale, made ready.



The Cardinal puffed with pride as the clear notes of the hidden Nightingale rose sweeter and sweeter.

The first number was a success. Everybody marveled at the unusual rendering of the trills. Chac Dzibdzib, hearing the prolonged applause, puffed with pride. Her royal plumes and crest of flaming red gleamed as the rays of the morning sun fell upon them.

The second number was a tender lullaby. As the clear notes rose sweeter and sweeter, everyone was spellbound. Suddenly the melody stopped. Chac Dzibdzib continued to make all the motions of singing, but in vain. Not a sound came from her pretty throat.

The professor flew immediately to the spot where X-Kokol Che, the Nightingale, was hiding. He found the poor bird jumping wildly from branch to branch and gasping for breath. It seemed that during one of her most beautiful trills, an insect had dived into her throat and lodged deep in her windpipe.

So the fraud was discovered. Chac Dzibdzib became purple with rage, and quick as lightning flew at the helpless bird and pecked at her fiercely with her sharp red bill.

The professor was very angry. He removed the insect from X-Kokol Che's throat. Then he presented the Nightingale to the public as the real singer, and she finished the concert.

Since then, O Gracious Prince, the bird X-Kokol Che, in spite of her homely appearance, is welcomed in every garden in the land of Mayab. At twilight, after the sun has sunk below the horizon and the soft breezes sway the high tops of the trees, the Nightingale, hiding in the thick foliage, sings and sings, pouring out her heart and soul in her melody.

X-Nuc Mani reached for her cane. She had talked longer than usual. She bade these goodbye and hastily entered her hut.

Na Dzul and his nurse, the noble lady, left immediately for the palace. From far, far in the distance the trills of the Nightingale came to them, and they quickened their pace.

The black mantle of night folded about them as they entered the royal grounds.

THE LEGEND OF
WHY THE CUCKOO
NEVER BUILDS A NEST

Na Dzul, the little Mayan prince, had scarcely taken his usual place under the ceiba tree, when X-Nuc Mani, leaning on a cane, came out of her palm-thatched little hut. She greeted the prince and the noble lady, his nurse, with a cheerful smile.

“And what shall our story be today. O Gracious Prince?” asked the Old Woman of Mani, seating herself on a low wooden stool close to the noble lady.

“I should like to hear about that naughty bird who throws the eggs out of his nest,” begged Na Dzul. “I saw one yesterday while I was playing in the royal gardens.”

“Ah, Gracious Prince?” cried X-Nuc Mani, lifting her faded eyes to heaven. “That was, no doubt, Dziu, the Cuckoo, the bird that is held in almost sacred reverence by the Mayans. No, indeed,” she added. “he is not at all naughty, as you will soon find out from this story.”

When life first began in the land of Mayab, [began the Old Woman of Mani] the bird Dziu was not as he is today. His feathers were of many colors, and his eyes were brown to match his plumage. In spring he used to build his nest, hatch his young, and rear them just as the other birds did.

But one day Yum Chaac, the rain-god, who was also god of farming, saw that the rich and fruitful soil was steadily losing its strength.

Yum Chaac was dismayed. He knew that without the gifts of the soil, life upon this earth would soon end. He thought and thought. Finally he decided that as a last resort the milpas, which were fields of vegetables, must be burned over, so that the ashes might fertilize the ground.

This was too great a task for one to undertake alone. So he summoned all the birds to his presence and said:

“I need your help. As you can see, our men work the ground unceasingly, yet the crops of corn, of squash, and of beans are becoming poorer and poorer. The old milpas must be burned. Kak, the god of fire, will kindle the blaze for us. But before that, all the different kinds of seeds must be gathered for next year's planting.”

The birds listened carefully to Yum Chaac and promised their help.

Early next morning Dziu, who was always first to answer the call of duty, arrived upon the scene. He worked diligently and collected more seeds than any other bird. But after many hours he grew tired, and with the hind permission of Yum Chaac he retired under a bush to rest.

Everything was going well until the other birds noticed the absence of Dziu. Then they began to slacken in their work.

Yum Chaac saw with alarm that the fire was advancing toward the patch of corn, and the birds had not reached that far to gather seeds. Suddenly, with a thunderous voice, he called for help. Corn, the most precious food for man as well as animals and birds, was in danger of

destruction. Someone must volunteer to save the ripened ears.

Again Yum Chaac called for help. He was desperate. No one had responded to his first appeal, and by this time the patch of corn was surrounded by fire.

Upon hearing the second call, some birds made feeble attempts to break through the wall of flames but without success. The heat was unbearable. The thick, black smoke was blinding.

For the third time the mighty voice of Yum Chaac thundered. He was very angry. There was a terrible threat in his tone.

All the birds trembled with fear. They were not afraid to die, but it was early spring. Some had their hens sitting on eggs; others had their young already hatched. The thought of their nestlings, naked and forever hungry, kept their feet rooted to the perches.

Dziu heard the last call for help, and rushed out of his resting place. The sight that met his gaze was appalling. A thick blanket of smoke screened the heavens. Fire, that dreadful monster of a thousand mouths, lashed by a sudden breeze was devouring everything in its path. The crackling sound of the burning stalks could be plainly heard.

Dziu was terrified. He thought of his little ones, so helpless in the nest. He knew that if corn were wiped off the earth, they would be deprived of their principal source of food. No, his choice was clear.

He flew to the top of a tree and studied the situation from above. Then, closing his eyes, he plunged into the raging fire. He fought desperately against the choking smoke. His eyes smarted terribly. In the intense heat he felt his beautiful plumes curling dangerously, but he continued picking the precious seeds from the smoldering stalks on to ground, and from the few that remained standing.

The other birds watched Dziu with admiration. Their usual chatter was hushed. Their bills hung wide open.

On the last trip, after he had gathered enough seeds to replace the destroyed milpas, Dziu fell exhausted to the ground. His eyes were inflamed, his feathers burned beyond recognition, and his body blistered in many places.

The birds rushed quickly to his assistance. Yum Chaac carried Dziu to a cool, shady place and revived him with fresh water.

The saving of the seed-corn was a deed so great that the birds requested a fitting reward for Dziu. This pleased Yum Chaac very much. He suggested that the family of Dziu be given the privilege of using the nests of other birds in which to lay their eggs. And, in token of their gratitude, all the birds in the land of Mayab offered to hatch and rear his young.

To remind the other birds of their promise to Dziu, Yum Chaac decreed that Dziu's eyes should ever remain red, and that the tips of his wings should show the grey of ashes.

And this, O Gracious Prince, is the reason the bird Dziu never builds a nest or rears his young. Without domestic cares, the bravest calf all the birds is free to protect the precious seed corn if the occasion should again arise.



***Closing his eyes against the choking smoke, the Cuckoo
plunged down into the burning corn stalks.***

X-Nuc Mani ended the story, and her eyes followed for a moment a tiny, many-colored bird flitting from flower to flower.

"That is the little Humming Bird, O Gracious Prince," explained X-Nuc Mani. "She, too, has a very pretty story."

"Could you tell us her story today?" Na Dzul asked hopefully.

"Oh, no, not today," replied the Old Woman of Mani, shaking her head. "But I shall be glad to tell it to you on your next visit." She reached for her cane, and with the gentle assistance of the Mayan prince entered her little hut.

Na Dzul and the noble lady his nurse, left for the palace in the ancient city of Chi Cheen Itza, with a new and understanding respect for the queer habits of the Cuckoo.

THE LEGEND OF
HOW THE HUMMING BIRD
DRESSED FOR HER WEDDING DAY

In the early morning Na Dzul, the little Mayan prince, had attended a celebration in honor of Yum Chaac, the rain-god. On his way back from the temple he begged his nurse, the noble lady, to take him that very afternoon to see the Old Woman of Mani as he was impatient to hear the story of the Humming Bird.

Na Dzul was still wearing the richly embroidered sandals and to head ornament of the early morning when they started their walk into the woods where X-Nuc Mani lived.

They found her working in her small, neat garden. Although she had not expected them so soon, she was very glad to see the little Mayan prince.

Na Dzul and his nurse, the noble lady, occupied their usual places under the ceiba tree as the story began.

In the beginning of time, O Gracious Prince, [the Old Woman of Mani told them] little Dzunuun, the Humming Bird, was not pretty. Her tiny feathers were scant, and she appeared almost naked.

Great changes had been taking place among all living things, but the Dzunuuns had been overlooked because they were such small birds.

And then one day the Nightingale, who was deep in the forest visiting her beloved singing professor, heard faint sounds of someone weeping. She looked down from her high perch.

In a bush close to a half-finished nest, a tiny bird was sobbing, sobbing as if her little heart would break. The Nightingale recognized the Humming Bird and flew down to comfort her. She was filled with pity for the tiny creature, and hopping nearer she asked:

“Why do you weep, little Dzunuun?”

The Humming Bird, surprised to have anyone take even the slightest interest in her, lifted her head.

“Oh, I am so unhappy!” she sobbed. “I want to be married, but I have no dowry. I am trying to build a nest, but my feathers are so few that I shall be completely naked before I can finish its lining.” And spreading her tiny wings she showed how bare she was already.

The Nightingale was pained to hear this sad tale. She, too, was poor and knew the agony. Unable to give the tiny Humming Bird any of the twigs she needed, she tried to think of some other way to help.

“Lighten your heart, little Dzunuun,” she said, sheltering the quivering bird with her extended wing. “I have a plan. I shall sing and bring all our friends of the forest together. Then I shall ask them to help you.”

So the Nightingale cleared her throat at once and began to pour forth melody. In less time than it takes to tell about it, a great crowd had gathered. Then she sang a beautiful song to them, whose words in the language of Mayab mean:

“Here is a sweet maiden
Who wishes to wed;
With sorrows she's laden,
She has not a bed.

“She lacks, too, the necklace,
That mark of her class;
She needs a new dress,
And mirror or glass.

“Her wedding demands
Sweetmeats for the feast
To help her you must
Give one thing at least.”

Upon hearing this pathetic appeal, everyone present felt sorry for the unhappy Humming Bird. X-Hom Xanil, a bird whose feathers are golden yellow, and whose throat has the red of rubies, was the first to respond. He flew down from his perch, ruffling his brilliant plumage for all to see, and sang to little Dzunuun:

“I shan't be called reckless
If I give the necklace.”

When he finished singing, he plucked his most gorgeous feathers, and started to make the red and yellow necklace that the Humming Bird wears today.

From her deep corner the Spider, that tireless worker of all time, heard the appeal. She left her spinning wheel for a moment, came to her door, and said:

“My gift to Dzunuun
Will be ready soon.”

and set herself to making a most delicate net for the wedding veil.

From nearby, the Well, whose waters were running noiselessly, sang from down in the depths:

“I'll be for this lass
A clear looking-glass.”

A buzzing Bee, circling lazily around a jasmine bush, commenced to hum:

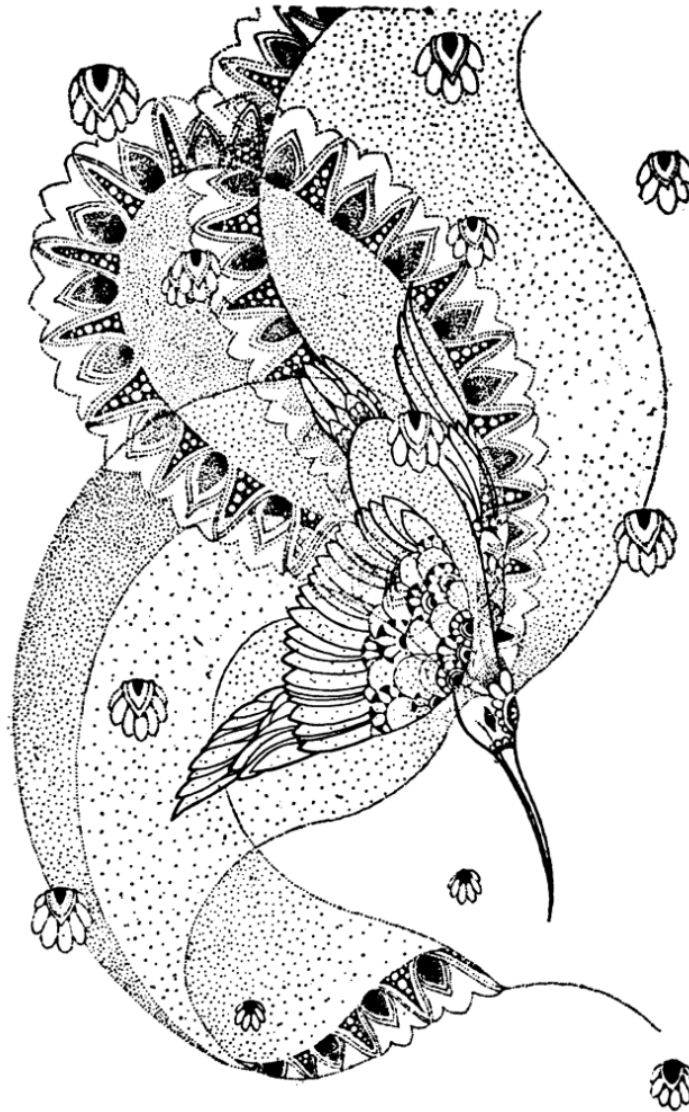
“Without trade or money
I'll give her my honey,”

and within a short time had gathered enough honey for the wedding feast.

The tree Bacal che, whose many branches were heavily weighted with fragrant white flowers, whispered in song.

“For the bridal showers,
May I offer flowers?”

Other birds of colorful plumage, wishing to provide a wedding gown for the little bride, sent for the Weaver Bird and began to pluck the tiniest feathers off their wing. In a short while the Weaver Bird had made a gorgeous robe in which were blended all the colors of the rainbow.



*Fragrant white blossoms from the heavily laden tree
showered upon the happy Humming Bird bride.*

The following morning, when the beams of the rising sun began to spread on the horizon like the golden stays of a huge fan, the Wedding of the Humming Bird took place in the presence of all her friends. As the Woodpeckers tapped the notes of a march, Dzunuun came out of her bower to join the waiting bridegroom. She was arrayed in the new robe that was like a rainbow, and she wore the red and yellow necklace. A flock of young warblers sang while the bride and groom hopped gracefully from branch to branch. After the ceremony the couple stopped an instant under the tree Bacal che, where a shower of its white blossoms fell over them.

Since then, O Gracious Prince, the Humming Bird goes through life without a care. Dressed in brilliant colors, she is always flitting from flower to flower and sipping nectar. This is the privilege granted her by the gift of the busy Bee.

At every clear pool she stops to look at her own reflection, for the Well had promised that all water was to be her looking-glass.

X-Nuc Mani ended the story and reached for her cane. She was tired, but she smiled kindly at the little prince when he wanted to know more about the Humming Bird.

“No, no, O Gracious Prince,” said the Old Woman of Mani, “there is no more to her story. But on your next visit I will tell you the story of the Turkey Buzzard.”

Na Dzul was too polite to insist. He took the hand of his nurse, the noble lady, and cheerfully started back to the palace. They were nearing the royal grounds when Na Dzul accidentally touched his bead ornament. It was made of the tiniest feathers from many Humming Birds.

“Dear little Dzunuun!” he exclaimed. “When I become king, you shall not be deprived of your pretty feathers.” And with that resolution in his heart, Na Dzul entered the gates of his palace in the ancient city of Chi C’een Itza.

THE LEGEND OF
HOW THE BUZZARD
SCORCHED HIS PLUMES

Na Dzul, the little Mayan prince, spent all morning in the courtyard of the temple playing ball with boys of his age. On his way home he asked his nurse, the noble lady, to take him that afternoon to the woods where the Old Woman of Mani lived.

With another trinket for X-Nuc Mani hidden in his belt, Na Dzul was ready to start long before the appointed hour.

The Old Woman of Mani was resting on a brightly colored hammock when Na Dzul and his nurse arrived. X-Nuc Mani welcomed her visitors with a smile, and in a short while they were seated on the low, wooden stools under the cool shadow of the ceiba tree.

“What story would you like to hear today, O Gracious Prince?” asked X-Nuc Mani, leaning her cane against her side.

Na Dzul did not answer. With wide eyes he was following a large, black bird that soared higher and higher in the air, until it finally became only a speck in the cloudless sky.

“Ah, O Gracious Prince!” cried X-Nuc Mani. “That is Chom, the Turkey Buzzard. You shall hear his story today.”

When life had just begun upon over land, [so the Old Workman of Mani told the story] Chom was a bird of great beauty. His colorful feathers were soft and glossy, and to single him out from the lesser birds, the gods gave him a crest of blue and yellow plumes.

At that time he was very hard to please. Only the choicest foods suited him, for, alas, this winged creature had one bad trait. He was a glutton. He seemed never to have enough of the delicate meats he fed upon. And that, O Gracious Prince, was the cause of his downfall.

It all happened in our glorious city of Uxmal, during a week of feasting. Celebrations were being held in all the temples, and on the wide terrace of the royal palace a food offering was prepared by the rich and powerful king.

Elaborate plans had been made for this grand affair. High priests, princes of royal blood, and all the brave warriors of the kingdom were bidden to attend.

For three, days the palace buzzed with activity. Brightly colored mats were spread the length of the terrace, garlands of flowers were hung between the arches, and a canopy of plumes was set in place under which the king and high priests would preside at the feast.

On the morning of the fourth day, before the invited guests arrived, servants began to arrange upon an altar trays of luscious fruits, baskets of barbecued corn, and large platters of meats, all deliciously spiced. According to an ancient custom, the food must remain one hour on the terrace of the royal palace, before the guests were allowed to touch it. So, after everything was set in order, the servants left the terrace.

Attracted by the savory aroma, the Turkey Buzzard, who was circling above, studied with hungry eyes the tempting meats. Chom had already eaten a hearty meal, but the sight of food prepared for kingly mouths aroused his ever-present appetite.

'Round and 'round in the blue sky hovered Chom, greedily eying the platters of meats upon the altar. Lower and lower he came followed by his large family, until he had enough courage to alight close to a platter of venison, brown and juicy after a long night of roasting in the barbecue pit.

All this time the king and his guests were impatiently waiting in the halls below. Often the king had spoken with pride of how many pheasants, how many wild turkeys, and how many deer the royal cooks had prepared.

A blare of trumpets gave the signal to start the march to the terrace. In order, according to rank, the guests followed the king, but he had scarcely set foot on the terrace when he stopped in dismay. Hearing his footsteps, a flock of Turkey Buzzards took sudden flight.

The sight that met the king's gaze was sickening. The platters, which an hour before had displayed the best art of the royal cooks, were empty. Mingled in terrible disorder were bones and flowers, as well as many feathers that the gluttons had shed while fighting for the best pieces of meat.

The king went purple with rage. With thunderous voice he called his archers. They came too late. Already the birds were flying high, and out of reach of the poisoned arrows.

The anger of the king was not to be satisfied until the culprits were punished. He called the H-Menes, who were the wise men, to his presence and said, "A sin against the gods has been committed. It is your duty to find a suitable punishment for such a crime."

Three days and three nights the wise men closeted themselves in the Major Temple of Uxmal studying the sacred Mayan Book. But in its record of all the history of life they found no mention of any crime like this.

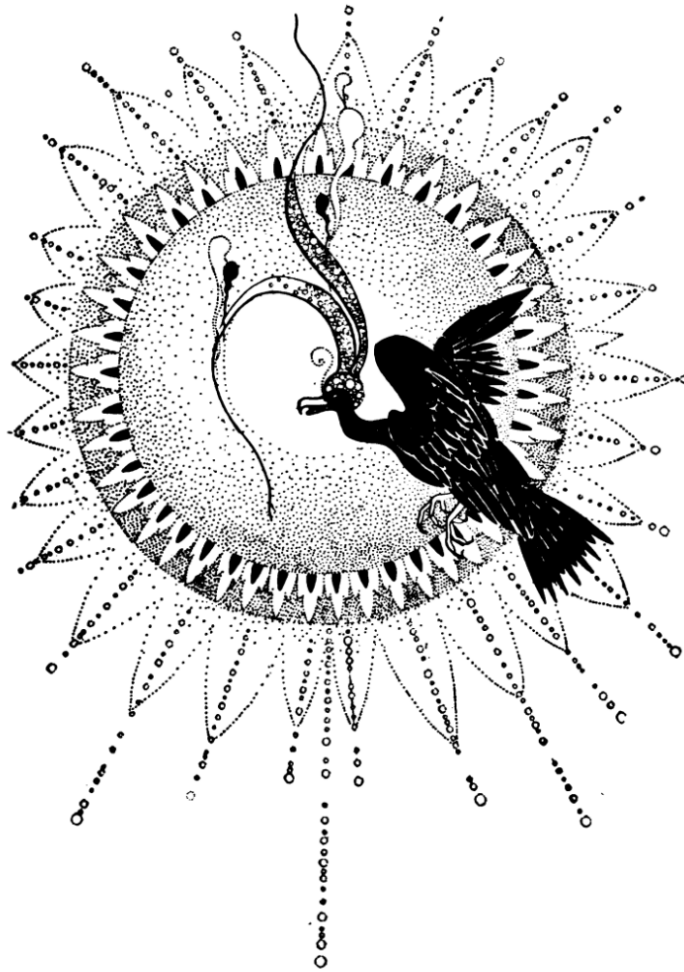
On the fourth day after consulting the will of the gods to wise men came out of the temple with lightened hearts. The gods had spoken.

The following morning the sun was almost screened front view. Yum Chaac, the rain-god, was showing his anger in dark heavy clouds, as the servants carried out the king's orders.

Again they placed platters of meats on the terrace, while behind thick pillars the king and his high priests concealed themselves to await the coming of the guilty birds. The Turkey Buzzards were prompt to arrive and, like some plague upon the green milpas, fell upon the platters of savory meats.

While the gluttons were enjoying themselves, out stepped the king and his high priests, each carrying a vessel of black liquid. And before to unsuspecting Turkey Buzzards could fly away, they had sprinkled them with the mixture and had pronounced magic words from the sacred Mayan Book.

Wherever the liquid fell upon them, their beautiful plumage was instantly changed into the coarse, black feathers that all the Turkey Buzzards have today.



The Turkey Buzzard flew too close to the sun and scorched his beautiful crest of blue and yellow.

Chom, who had planned the crime, flew higher and higher in the air, in order to shake off the few drops of the fatal liquid that had touched him, until he finally disappeared behind the shifting clouds. But he flew too close to the sun, and his beautiful crest of blue and yellow plumes was hopelessly scorched.

Chom nursed his burns for long, sick at heart over the loss of his beautiful plumage. But not until his sores were healed, did he realize that he was doomed to wear forever the ugly scars that show to this day. Since then, O Gracious Prince, the Turkey Buzzard no longer feeds on selected foods. Now he is regarded as the scavenger of the earth.

The Old Woman of Mani ended her story with a slight gesture of disgust. She reached for her cane, and thanking Na Dzul for his present, walked to her hut.

Na Dzul had learned another lesson. The story of Chom impressed him greatly. He waved a last farewell to X-Nuc Mani, took the hand of his nurse, the noble lady, and started back to his palace in the ancient city of Chi Cheen Itza.

THE LEGEND OF
WHY THE OWL
STAYS HOME ALL DAY

For many days. X-Nuc Mani had awaited the coming of her little visitor. Each afternoon, when her few chores were done, she Sat patiently at the entrance of her small palm hut, hoping to see the little prince before the day was over. She was very fond of him. She liked his polite manners, and she liked especially the way he kept silent when she was speaking.

One afternoon, when she had nearly lost hope of talking with Na Dzul again, she looked up and saw him and his nurse, the noble lady, approaching between the tall trees that bordered the path to her hut.

With the aid of her cane, X-Nuc Mani arose to greet the little prince. Her kind, wrinkled face beamed with joy as Na Dzul ran to meet her.

Beneath the sheltering branches pf the ceiba tree, the three were soon seated and enjoying the refreshing breeze that stirred the young leaves above them. X-Nuc Mani smiled at the little prince.

Have you ever wondered, O Gracious Prince, [the Old Woman of Mani began her story] why Tunkuluch Hu, the Night Owl, is seldom seen in daylight? This handsome bird. looked upon with distrust by some people, is only the victim of his own folly.

Long. long ago, when the world was still young. Tunkuluch Hu was able to see at night as well as by day. This was a privilege granted him by the gods because of his great love of study.

Most of his time he spent in deep thinking. But he was sociable by nature, and from time to time he left his home in the hollow tree to enjoy the company of other birds. In the congress of birds, the Owl had been chosen Grand Counselor to the Court because of his great wisdom.

One day the birds in the land of Mayab prepared a royal banquet in honor of their kings the Peacock. To this feast all the birds were invited, but a special committee was sent to escort the Grand Counselor to the dinner.

The Owl disliked entertainments given in honor of the king, for they were always for young and old together, and he knew how they usually ended. So, giving his many studies as an excuse, he refused to go.

Knowing his sedate habits, the committee was not surprised. But they feared the anger of their king and said, "O Tunkuluch Hu, wise one. have you forgotten your duties? As Grand Counselor to the Court, you must preside at the banquet."

The Owl could offer no other excuse. He breathed a deep sigh, preened his handsome feathers, and then followed the birds to the heart of the forest.

The banquet table was the long, heavy limb of a very large tree. From the smaller branches above hung the ollas containing the refreshments. The king had reserved a place by his side for the Owl, and as soon as Tunkuluch Hu arrived the gay feast began. The lesser birds passed the food on fresh, green leaves, and placed buttercups filled with dew-drops before the thirsty guests.

In a short while everyone except Tunkuluch Hu was having a merry time. The young birds, especially the Jays and Macaws, so annoyed the cross old Owl with their shrill cries that he began to regret his coming.

As the sun descended toward the horizon, the party became more and more lively. To the tune of the Woodpeckers' tapping, Chom, the Turkey Buzzard, and Kau, the Blackbird, were whirling madly in a wild dance, with garlands of flowers around their necks. Even their king, the Peacock, forgetting that he had bartered his voice for fine feathers, was shrieking so loudly that the beasts of the jungle fled in fright.

The Owl could no longer endure the noise and actions of the company. Taking advantage of the confusion, he started to leave before the party was over, only to be called back by the king.

Tunkuluch Hu obeyed the Peacock's order. But, perching himself on a high limb, he turned his back upon the noisy merrymakers.

Presently the Peacock noticed the disgusted manner of the Grand Counselor. The king decided he was being slighted by this honored guest and used his authority to command that Tunkuluch Hu take part in the celebration. He forced the Owl to dance with the others and even to join in the discordant chorus of the birds of the barnyard.

Tunkuluch Hu was cut to the heart. The cruel jesting of the birds after the party was over made him feel very unhappy. For several days he brooded over his trouble. He realized with a pang of regret that his reputation was ruined. And neither the thought of food nor the entreaties of his friends could coax the Owl from his self-imposed seclusion.

Eagerly he delved into the Mayan Book of Life. With minute patience he searched through the old records. The one desire of his life was to expose the king to ridicule, to humiliate the Peacock as the Peacock had humiliated him.

After many days the Owl finally found the thing for which he was looking. From an old parchment inside the covers of the Mayan Book of Life, he read how the Peacock had tricked the good and trusting Puhuy, the Road Runner, into giving him the feathers which he had used to gain a kingdom. He learned also that the treacherous king had never made good his promise to the Road Runner.

So the Owl sent messengers all over the land, inviting the birds of the Forest of Mayab to a mass meeting. Then, and only then, the old Counselor was happy again.

The sun was shining brightly when Tunkuluch Hu came out of his hollow tree. With a long roll under one wing, and the other slightly extended, he took his place on a branch where he was to address the assembled birds.

"Brethren of the forest," he commenced in a loud voice, while he carefully unrolled the accusing document, "you must know—" He repeated, blinking his round, amber eyes, "You must know—"



*The Owl came out of his hollow tree with the long roll
of his written speech under his wing.*

He tried to read, but even though he brought the parchment close to his eyes, he could not make out a word. He noticed with terror that his vision was becoming dimmer and dimmer, until the writing turned into a solid blur. With a shriek of despair he let the parchment fall to the ground.

The truth dawned upon him. Those long days spent in the seclusion of his home had so accustomed his eyes to darkness that he was blinded by the light of day.

And this, O Gracious Prince, is the reason that the Owl is seldom seen in daylight. His desire to denounce his king had been punished by the gods.

Na Dzul was first to rise after the story was ended. He gave the Old Woman the present he had brought for her, and taking the hand of his nurse, the noble lady, as is the custom of the children of Mayab, he eagerly started back to the palace. The next morning he would tell his teachers, the wise men, of the lesson he had learned from the story of the Night Owl.

THE LEGEND OF
WHY THE BLACKBIRD
WEARS DEEP MOURNING

Na Dzul, the little Mayan prince, was eager to hear more of the stories that the Old Woman of Mani told. He begged his father, the king, to invite her to spend a few days at the royal palace. It was a new experience for X-Nuc Mani, who had spent most of her long life in the little palm hut in the woods, but to please the little boy she consented to come.

In the carefully laid-out gardens, under a bower of fragrant jasmine blossoms, Na Dzul chose a spot where she could sit while she related her stories to him.

X-Nuc Mani was very wise. She began with the story of the Blackbird.

It is told among our people. O Gracious Prince, [said the Old Woman of Mani] that in the time of long ago Kau, the Blackbird, was as white as the foam on the breaking waves.

She was a tender mother, and always came back to her nestlings long before other mothers even thought of their little ones crying hungrily in the nest. She was kind to everyone, and never lent an ear to gossip; and so it was no wonder she was liked by every bird in the land of Mayab.

Among her many friends, the closest was Chic Buul, the Sparrow Hawk. They were seen many times together, roaming through the milpas. Often, when Kau was hungry, Chic Buul picked the grains from the tall stalks for her.

Late one afternoon, after they had played all day, the Sparrow Hawk said in his harsh, rasping voice, "I am tired and hungry. I am going to the forest for something good to eat."

The Blackbird suddenly remembered that her friend sometimes had a vicious habit of making a meal on helpless mice or young birds. She thought with a pang of her little darlings in the nest, and felt as if a sharp-pointed arrow had pierced her heart.

"Dear Chic Buul," she said, with a catch in her voice, "I think so much of you, but I strongly disapprove of your appetite for young birds. Can you not find anything else to eat?"

"But my dear Kau!" protested the Sparrow Hawk. "I haven't said what I shall feed upon. Of course, if I should happen to find fat little birds—"

For a moment Kau felt only disgust upon hearing his last remark. Then, bursting with anger, she said. "Well, whatever you do, leave my babies alone!"

The Sparrow Hawk was fond of his Blackbird friend. He understood her motherly anxiety, and had no wish to give her the slightest cause for worry. He cleared his throat, and in his harsh, rasping voice assured her, "Of course, friend Kau, I promise to spare your babies. Tell me where they live and what they look like."

Kau was silent for a second. She liked Chic Buul, but because he preyed upon young birds she did not trust him altogether. So she hesitated, sighed, and finally said, 'Well, you see, my nest is hidden in the great forest, and my babies are so beautiful that there are no words with which to describe them.'

Trying to form in his mind a picture of how his friend's nestlings must look, the hungry Sparrow Hawk flew away into the forest in search for something to eat.

First he chanced upon a well-built nest from which three pretty little birds were peeping. Their plump, yellow bodies were already partially covered with beautifully tinted feathers.

"No doubt," thought Chic Buul, "those lovely youngsters belong to my friend, Kau. So no matter how hungry I become, I will not touch them." And before the temptation could force him to break the trust of friendship, he flew far from the little beauties.

Exhausted by his long flight, the Sparrow Hawk finally stopped to rest on a large cottonwood tree. From his high perch he beheld four little nestlings sleeping in a downy nest. "Aha!" he said. "Food at last!" But as he hopped closer, he noticed that they were as white as the flowers of Dzal huun. Chic Buul was puzzled. How could he decide which were the offspring of his friend? The ones he had just left were as beautiful as he supposed Kau's babies should be, and these were as white as she was. Unable to decide, the hungry Sparrow Hawk flew on.

He flew and flew until he spied, on a low branch of a ceiba tree, three scrawny creatures that were shrieking and flapping their naked wings. As they heard him approaching, the little things opened their mouths from ear to ear, begging for food.

Chic Buul breathed a sigh of relief. "This time," he thought, "I have found my dinner." And in the twinkling of an eye, the shrill cries of the homely little creatures were silenced.

Kau, the Blackbird, returned to the forest as soon as her errands were done. As usual she brought, safely stored in her crop, food for her little darlings. "Cow! Cow!" she called from a distance, to let them know that their evening meal was on its way. Pausing a moment to drink at a clear Akal, or pool, she listened for their reply. None came. Alarmed, she flew straight to her nest. It was empty.

A sharp, piercing cry escaped from the throat of the unhappy mother. She flew about, shrieking and calling the most endearing names she knew, hoping to find her nestlings hiding in the thick foliage at the tree.

She called and called, but only the mocking echo of her own voice answered her. Then, all of a sudden, she remembered the Sparrow Hawk. "The beast! The treacherous beast!" she cried, flapping her wings with rage. And as fast as her wings could carry her, back she went in search of the faithless friend.

Chic Buul was shocked at her accusing words. "What!" he demanded, cocking his head. "Do you mean to tell me those ugly looking

creatures were yours?"

"Oh, you heartless wretch!" cried the distracted mother, flapping her wings with fury. "I shall never forgive you, Chic Buul! Your utter ignorance of a mother's love for her darlings makes your crime more horrible! To me my babies were beautiful!"

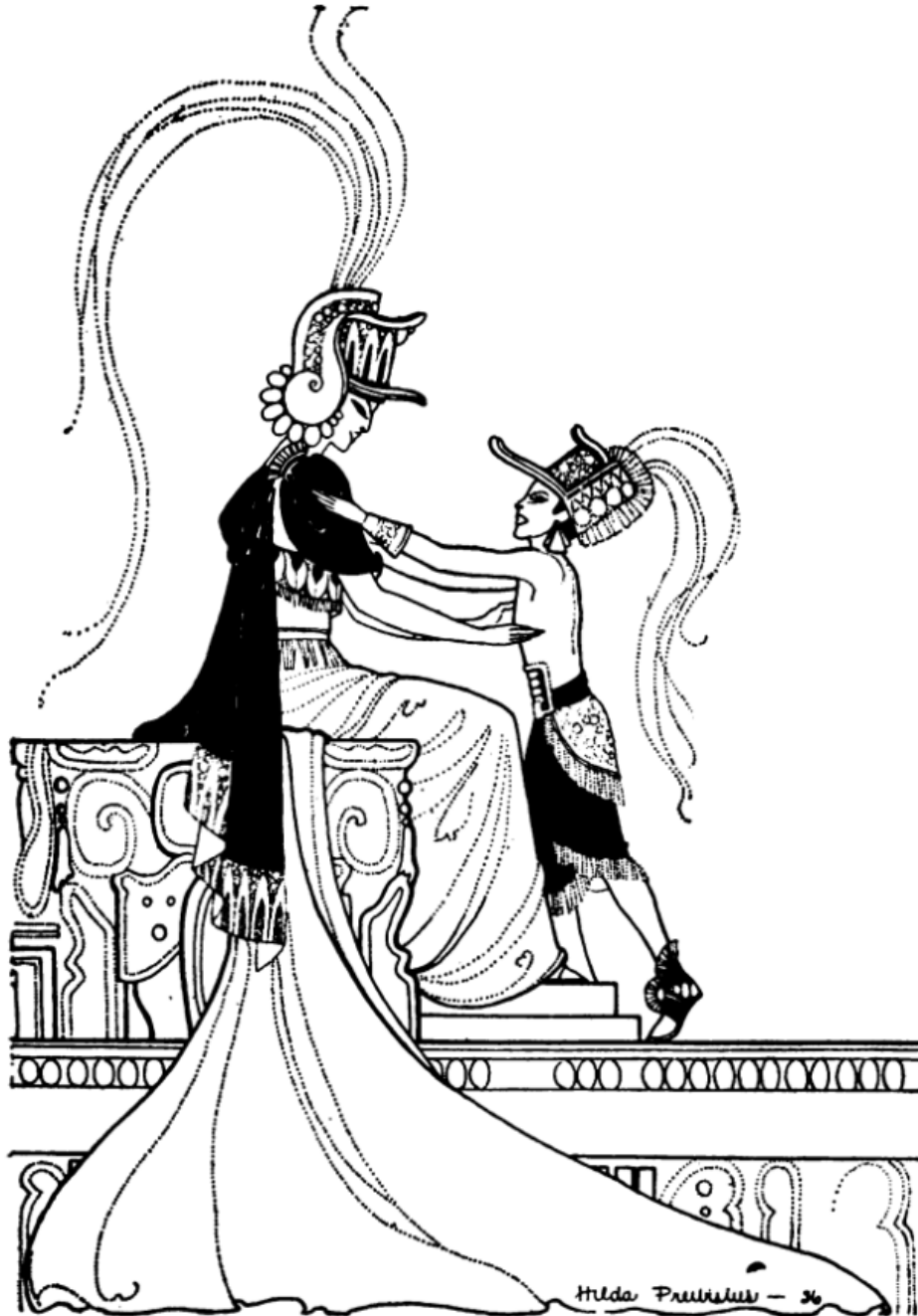
The Sparrow Hawk hung his head in shame. And before he could offer a word of regret, Kau turned her back on him.

With bended head and wings drooping at her sides, the Blackbird spent the long night in the forest, near her empty nest. The following morning her feathers, which had been white, had turned black. And to this day Kau mourns the loss of her little darlings.



With bended head and drooping wings, the Blackbird mourned through the long night close to her empty nest.

Na Dzul's sympathetic brown eyes were veiled with tears when the Old Woman of Mani ended the story, His thoughts turned to his own mother who, like the mother bird of the story, loved her child above everything. He waved a hasty good-bye to the Old Woman of Mani and ran into the palace. And with an affection he had rarely shown before he threw himself into the loving arms of his young mother.



The love of the Mayan prince for his own mother made the story of the mother Blackbird very real.

THE LEGEND OF
WHY THE SWALLOW
BUILDS A NEST OF MUD

Long, long ago, O Gracious Prince, [so the Old Woman of Mani began her story on the second day at the palace] Cuzam, the Barn Swallow, was a vain, and selfish bird. She was proud of her swiftness of flight and of her deeply forked tail with its two tapering tips.

Thinking herself superior, she considered beneath her such lowly household duties as nest building and hatching the young.

Every year when the nesting season came, Cuzam would wander through the green forest in search of some empty nest in which to lay her eggs, but finally the birds who had been robbed of their nests complained to the gods.

The gods knew of this disgraceful habit of the Barn Swallow's but they were lenient because of her beauty, and especially because of her swiftness, for she had been useful in carrying messages to far distant tribes.

"Perhaps the poor thing doesn't know how to build a nest," the gods told the complaining mothers. "Why don't you teach her how to build one? Cuzam is a sensible bird, and no doubt she will be willing to learn."

And so the next morning a group of prominent housekeepers approached Cuzam. The Mourning Dove was the first to speak. "Soft grass is the best in nest lining," she advised. "First you must take a few sticks and—"

"Oh yes, yes," the Barn Swallow cut in with a saucy tilt of her pretty head, "I know all about it."

The Mourning Dove was indignant. "If Cuzam knows all about nest building," she reflected, "why doesn't she build one herself?" And nodding her shimmering head in doubt, she flew back to her nestlings.

"All I can tell you is how to build a comfortable one," said the Blackbird. "With plants, stalks and bits of—"

"Yes, yes, I know all about that, too," interrupted Cuzam, stamping her dainty little foot on her perch. And before the kind-hearted Blackbird had uttered another word, Cuzam darted to a lower branch of the tree.

Then the little Humming Bird came along. She, too, had been asked to teach the Barn Swallow how to build a nest. "First you take soft down from your breast," she said in her wee, wee voice, "and then—"

"You bore me!" Cuzam interrupted rudely. "I know all about building a nest, but I don't care to build one," And before the astonished Humming Bird had closed her slender bill, Cuzam flew deep into the forest in search of a ready-made nest in which to lay her eggs.

The gods heard of the curt refusal of the Barn Swallow to listen to the good advice of other mothers, and ordered her appearance in court.

"You have defied all our efforts to teach you how to be a good mother," the gods said in a stern voice. "We have reached the limit of our patience with you. So from now on we give all other birds permission to

throw your eggs from their nests. If you care to raise a family, Cuzam, you must build a nest of your own."



***The gods ordered the Barn Swallow to appear in court,
where she was told she must build a nest of her own.***

For the first time in her life the Barn Swallow was frightened. The commanding tone of the gods left no doubt in her mind that their decision was final. Determined to mend her ways, she went to the Mourning Dove for information.

"I am sorry" the Mourning Dove said in answer to her request. "but you told me you knew all about it!" And with a graceful nod of her pretty head, she hopped away, chanting her mournful call, "Mucuy! Mucuy! Cuy! Cuy!"

Cuzam was not discouraged by this rebuff. Never dreaming of another, she went to little Humming Bird. But she, too, refused to give her any information. Nor would any of the other birds, little knowing that this time Cuzam was in earnest.

In desperation, the Barn Swallow flew deep into the forest, and there, working long and hard, built herself a nest. But its construction was so poor that it fell to pieces when she laid her first egg.

Sad and discouraged, Cuzam flew every day to the great forest, hoping to find some way to solve her problem. There, early one morning as she was drinking from the waters of a clear pool adjoining a cave she heard a soft voice crying for help.

“Pull me out!” someone called in despair. “Pull me out!”

Cuzam could not believe her ears. “Who can be calling for help at this early hour?” she asked herself. Then, flying over the Akal, searching from one side to the other she finally saw a tiny creature clinging desperately to a small leaf and drifting helplessly in the rough water.

Now, the Barn Swallow was not one to help anybody without reward, and thinking of her resent need she said, “Yes, I will save you from drowning, if you promise to teach me how to make a nest”

The Wasp, for it was a Wasp that drifted in the water, gave his promise. So Cuzam lifted him out and set him on the edge of the cave.

After the Wasp had shaken the water from his shapely body, Cuzam reminded him of his promise.

“First,” said the Wasp, fluttering his delicate wings in the sunshine, “take a ball of fresh mud and throw it against this side of the cave.”

Cuzam hesitated. She had never heard of using mud in the making of a nest but perhaps this was only its foundation. She did as she was told.

“Now,” the Wasp directed, “take a wisp of grass and—”

Cuzam worked diligently as she had never worked before, following the Wasp’s orders, and finally the result of her labor looked like an ugly, cup-shaped lump of clay thrown against the side of the cave.

“You have made a fine, looking nest, lady,” said the Wasp. with satisfaction.

“But— but——” Cuzam stammered “that nest is not finished. See the sharp ends of grass sticking out of it. No, no! Something more must be done to make it suitable for me!”

“Why, no, of course not,” cried the Wasp with surprise. “That nest is fit for a queen.”

“What!” Cuzam blazed with indignation. “That dirty looking thing! No, indeed!” And puffing with anger she flew at the homely nest to destroy it. But just in time she remembered what the gods had said.

X-Nuc Mani reached for her cane and slowly rose. She took the hand of the little prince and walked with him to the far corner of the palace. Pointing to a row of nests attached to the side of the building, close under the beams, she said, “Now, you see, O Gracious Prince, the result of the Barn Swallow’s not heeding the advice of other mothers.”

“But why can’t she still ask them how to build a nest?” said Na Dzul. “Hers is very homely and not like the nests of other birds.”

“Because the foolish Cuzam is still too proud, and so, season after season, the Barn Swallow builds her nest with mud and grass. just as the Wasp taught her many, many years. ago.”

Na Dzul made no suggestion after that. He thanked the Old Woman of Mani for telling him the story, and lending her his shoulder for support strolled with her through the gardens, until Noh Kin, the sun-god, ended his long journey across the cloudless skies of Mayab.

THE LEGEND OF
WHY THE MOURNING DOVE
FLIES CLOSE TO THE GROUND

Today, O Gracious Prince,” said X-Nuc Mani on her third day at the palace, “I shall tell you the story of the unhappy Mucuy, the Mourning Dove.”

This gloomy creature, [so the Old Woman of Mani began her story] whose plaintive call wakens you in the early morning, has no one to blame for her sorrow but herself. She alone is responsible.

During the confused period at the beginning of time, Mucuy was a very homely bird.. Her feathers were a dull and dusty brown. And although she had the long, graceful flight of the swifts and swallows, she was not happy. She resented her lack of beauty very, very much.

Every morning, while other birds were hunting insects for their breakfast, Mucuy would go to the nearest pool to gaze at her reflection in the water. “Dear me! Dear me!” she would lament. “How ugly I am!” And in this fashion she spent most of her time, until one day the Great Spirit, weary of her complaining, called her to his presence.

“Why is it, Mucuy,” the Great Spirit asked kindly, “that you are always complaining about your appearance? Have you no other thing in life to make up for your lack of beauty?”

The Mourning Dove did not answer. With bowed head she was listening, but she did not quite understand his questions.

“When I created the earth,” the Great Spirit continued, “I meant to endow each creature with a gift of some kind. To some I gave the beauty of plumage, to others the sweet melody of song, and—”

“Oh, yes,” interrupted the Mourning Dove, suddenly recalling her own gift. “I have swiftness of flight, but I can’t help seeing that other birds are better dressed. The Humming Bird has all the vivid colors of the rainbow. The glamorous Cardinal, like a royal queen, bears upon her shoulders a scarlet mantle. But, alas, poor me!” she sighed. “My plain looking coat is the ugly shade of moldy leaves.”

The Great Spirit was touched. “Perhaps this poor bird is right,” he reflected: and after a pause he said, “I have a plan, Mucuy. I can make you as handsome as the birds you admire, but you must do something in return.”

“No doubt! No doubt!” agreed Mucuy. “I will do whatever you wish, if you will make me beautiful.”

The Great Spirit agreed to the bargain. The following morning he called into his presence all the birds in the land of Mayab.

“We are in need of another messenger,” he announced to the assembled birds. “I have chosen Mucuy, and for her services I have promised to change her present attire into a beautiful uniform.”

A murmur of approval rose from all the other birds. For a long time they had felt the need of someone to carry messages to the far tribes.

“I have already used all my tints and hues on you,” the Great Spirit continued, addressing the birds again, “and I must ask each of you who has

colorful feathers to donate one for Mucuy's new dress."

So with the feathers the birds gave, a robe for the new messenger was soon made. In its weaving, the soft gray of early dawn and the rose and lavender of morning clouds were blended with all the iridescent colors she wears today.

The Mourning Dove was gloriously happy. She flew to the nearest pool, where in its glassy waters she admired her new uniform. "How sweet! How sweet I look!" she repeated over and over, proudly strutting back and forth and nodding her shimmering head in self-approval.

A little while after that, when the election of a new chief was to be voted among the members of the winged tribes, Mucuy was called to perform her duties as a messenger. She bound the notes to her slender leg, and with the best intentions in the world flew away.



The Mourning Dove flew to the nearest pool, where in its glassy waters she admired her new uniform.

But her vanity was the cause of her downfall.

As she was flying over a clear pool, she felt herself seized by a violent desire to look at her new dress once more. Forgetting all about her mission, the conceited Mourning Dove alighted by the quiet Akal.

The message had been given her in the early hours of the morning. By now Noh Kin, the sun-god, was high up in the skies, and Mucuy was still parading along the edge of the pool. Her mission had gone completely from her mind.

All this time the Great Spirit was sitting on his throne, awaiting the coming of the chiefs. He waited and waited. The sun-god had traveled half the distance he covered every day, yet no one had appeared.

The Great Spirit became very angry. With thunderous voice he called the Turkey Buzzards, and sent them to find out why the chiefs had not come to the meeting.

The Turkey Buzzards, guards of the court, returned with the astonishing news that not a single message had been delivered. The anger of the Great Spirit now knew no bounds. Obedience was the first law of his court, and Mucuy, the Mourning Dove, had disobeyed him. Immediately he sent the guards to bring her to his presence.

Mucuy was still gazing at her lovely reflection in the Akal when the Turkey Buzzards found her. Frightened but still nodding her shimmering head in self-approval, she followed them to the court.

"You have broken my faith in you, foolish Mucuy!" cried the angered Great Spirit, seeing the messages still tied to her slender leg. "So I must punish you!"

The Mourning Dove trembled with terror at hearing his last words. She tried to speak, but she could not utter a sound. Regretting her folly, she awaited with downcast eyes the decision of the court.

"I cannot change you back again to your former homely appearance," the Great Spirit thundered at her, "because your handsome dress was given you by other birds. But," he added with fury, "I can take away your swiftness of flight. And from now on, close to the ground where lizards and snakes dwell, you and your kind shall remain, forever!"

And so, O Gracious Prince, when Noh Kin, the sun-god, comes up every morning, flushed with pride over being an early riser, the unfortunate Mucuy chants her call, "Mucuy!" which now means, "Oh, me! I've lost! I've lost!" And in the mournful sound of her call is deep regret for the long, graceful flights that can never be hers again!

Na Dzul had long wondered what the call of the Mourning Dove meant. He had listened to her every morning. And from his window he had watched her strutting back and forth in the royal garden, always nodding her shimmering head.

He thanked the Old Woman of Maui, and like a true gentleman escorted her back to the palace in the ancient city of Chi Cheen Itza.

THE LEGEND OF
WHY THE QUAIL
NESTS IN THE GRASS

Mayans had always been early risers in order to avoid the mid-day heat of the tropics. When the whistling Lark welcomed the dawn with her melodious notes, laborers were already at work in the milpas.

One morning sunrise found the little Mayan prince and his nurse, the noble lady, on their way through the woods to visit X-Nuc Mani. The young prince had been excused from his regular lessons because the day was to be one of feasting at the royal palace.

When her visitors arrived, the Old Woman of Mani was nowhere to be seen. The door to her hut was open so they brought out the wooden stools and sat beneath the ceiba tree to await her return.

They had not been there long when Na Dzul, looking eagerly in all directions, saw her coming out of the thicket carrying something in her apron. Uttering little shouts of joy, he ran to meet her.

"Be careful, O Gracious Prince" warned X-Nuc Mani, smiling as the boy approached her, "for my charge is of delicate nature." And opening one corner of her apron she invited him to peek.

Na Dzul gasped in wonder. There, in the bottom of her apron, he counted ten tiny birds, mottled in color and much smaller than day-old chicks. The young prince was completely charmed.

"Did you have to climb a tree to get them?" he asked in one breath, helping the old woman place the lively little things in a bamboo cage.

"Oh, no, O Gracious Prince!" she replied, amused at the boy's slight knowledge of the ways of birds. "These nest on the ground, but there was a time when they built their home in the tree tops. And if you care to hear the story sometime—"

"Oh, please tell it today!" pleaded the little prince, squatting by the bamboo age to play with the tiny birds. X-Nuc Mani nodded and seated herself under the giant ceiba tree.

It was told among the ancient Mayans [the Old Woman of Mani began the story this way] that in the time when animals had just come into being, Bech, the Quail, was a favorite bird of the gods. She was endowed with beautiful plumage of pleasing colors, and a saucy little tuft of feathers sat high upon her head.

She was allowed to build her nest in the high boughs of trees to protect her young from beasts and hunters. And so her family kept getting larger and larger.

Any other living being would have been grateful for all those privileges, but the Quail felt that she had not been given enough. In her selfish mind she even had visions of a world entirely for herself and her increasing family.

One day the kind Great Spirit wished to visit the earth. He longed to see once more the world he had helped to make. Inviting Yaax Kin the Sun

Prince, to accompany him on his journey, he took the form of a human being, and descended upon the earth.

The news made Box Buc, Prince of Darkness, turn black with fury. He determined to spoil the plan.

"I have known the Great Spirit much longer than my enemy, the Prince of Light, has known him" he thundered, "for darkness came before light!" He wrapped his black cloak around his dusky body and shuddered violently. His gloomy palace was cold and damp, for sunshine never entered there.

Box Buc paced the floor trying to collect his thoughts, and suddenly, like a flash of light, an idea crossed his mind. The rules of heaven forbade any god to leave his post to mingle with mortals on earth.

"If I can prove the Sun Prince has visited the earth," he decided, "he will be punished." After he had made his plan, and sent his spies to earth to trail the visitors, he sat on his ebony throne to await results.

All this time the Great Spirit and the Sun Prince were happily touring the earth. They visited great cities, and crossed roaring oceans, and were thoroughly enjoying their trip.

Although the unsuspecting travelers were many times within shouting distance of the spies sent by Box Buc, not once did these spies catch even a fleeting glimpse of them.

It was late afternoon when the Great Spirit and the Sun Prince reached the land of Mayab. By this time the spies were close on their trail, and redoubled their efforts to find them before the day was over.

But as they entered the jungle, the genii of the welcoming forest noticed the presence of the spies and vowed to protect their guests. The roots of trees bridged the chasms along their way. The calm waters of the Akals parted to shorten their path, and the dust on the roads rose in clouds to screen the heavenly visitors from their pursuers.

The spies of the Prince of Darkness, thoroughly disgusted with the continued failure of their plans, decided to question the birds. Making their hoarse and rasping voices as sweet as they could, they asked, "Little birds, have you seen two strangers passing?"

The unnatural sweetness of their tone did not deceive the cunning winged creatures. Instantly they suspected the ugly mission of the spies and refused to give any information. Darting from branch to branch, they besought other birds to shield their beloved guests.

Because of their love for their creator, the birds of the sunny forest promised to do so. Only Bech, the Quail, that selfish bird whose ambition was to have a world all her own, laughed at their request.

"Why should I care what annoys the Great Spirit?" she shouted, tilting her pretty head with cold disdain. "I never asked him to come, anyway."

She turned her back on the astonished birds and beckoned her offspring. Hurriedly she whispered something, and as the heavenly visitors drew near, her large family flocked together and took flight with an

explosive whir.

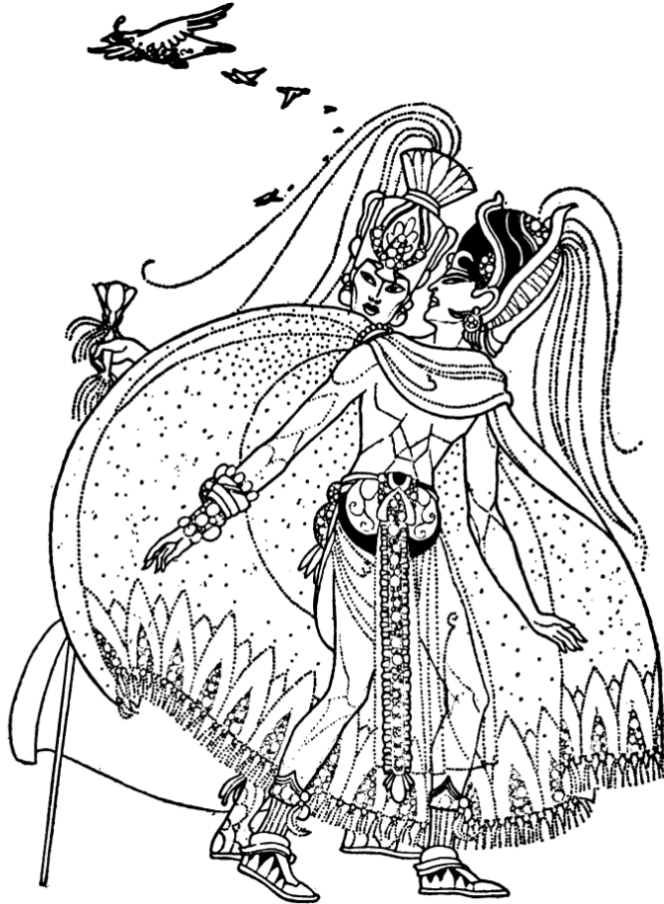
Surprised at the noise made by the stampeding birds, the Great Spirit paused a moment to investigate the source. And in that very instant the spies had the desired glimpse of him.

The kind Great Spirit was deeply grieved. In a flash he realized the cowardly scheme of Box Buc. He shed tears of bitter disappointment when he recognized the bird that had purposely betrayed them and he remembered how much he had loved her. "From now on, O treacherous Bech," he passed sentence, "your kind shall be always at the mercy of wild animals and hunters, for close to the ground you shall live forever!"

The little Mayan prince looked up quickly. His glance went from the face of the Old Woman of Mani to the bamboo cage.

"Yes, O Gracious Prince," X-Nuc Mani told him, nodding her head, "the sentence was fulfilled, for even this morning, I, an old, old woman, was able to catch those tiny, fluffy birds as they moved along the ground."

Na Dzul thanked the Old Woman of Mani and asked to have another glimpse of the Quail in the bamboo cage. And before he could tear himself away from watching the scampering little things, the violets along the road back to the royal palace had already drunk the last drop of morning dew.



As the visitors drew near, the large family of Quail flocked together and took flight with an explosive whir.

THE LEGEND OF
WHY THE MOTMOT
LIVES IN THE FOREST

Beneath the spreading branches of the cebia tree, Na Dzul and the noble lady, his nurse, were seated one afternoon enjoying the sweetly scented air from the neighboring woods. X-Nuc Mani, sitting across from them, folded her hands upon her white huipil and said: "Today, O Gracious Prince, you shall hear the story of Toh, the Motmot."

When the earth was still young, [so the Old Woman of Mani began the story] Toh was called the Royal Bird of Mayab. His handsome train of long, thickly-barbed feathers gave him a kingly appearance.

He was so proud of his colorful train that from the time he was old enough to help with the simple chores of nest-keeping, he refused to work. He was afraid of spoiling, his beautiful tail.

Every morning, as the sun rose above the man-made hills of Mayab, Toh would fly to a leafy bower where an army of idle birds met every day to gossip. After his regular rounds were made, Toh would come home to an appetizing meal of fresh insects and fruits.

One morning the blue skies appeared heavily overcast with large, dark rain clouds. The leaves on the tall trees hung drooping and still. Everywhere the birds of the barnyard sought shelter from the coming storm.

Yum Chaac, the rain god, anxiously inspected the Akals. He remembered with deep sorrow when the earth had been buried under water. That time the heavy-laden clouds had not heeded his command to stop raining when the soil had drunk deeply enough.

Now, to his dismay, he found the reservoirs far too small to hold the water which was likely to fall if the clouds should burst.

"No, no!" he exclaimed, closing his eyes for a moment, "It must never happen again."

His plans took no more than a second to shape. He called his friends of the forest. He told the larger animals what he expected of them. He assigned each bird to his station.

The Woodpecker was to cut branches with which to dam the Akals, should the need arise. The Road Runner was to watch the roads and warn others. From his lofty height the Turkey Buzzard would supervise the work.

Yum Chaac, the rain god, ordered a group of large and husky birds to gather seeds of brush and shrubs in order to replant the forests in case of destruction. Among these workers was Toh, the Royal Bird of Mayab.

The Motmot was very indignant. "Huh!" he sneered, spreading the gorgeous feathers of his tail. "Imagine me, the aristocrat, with slaves for my own service, working like any common bird!" He was indifferently preening his brilliant feathers when a friend warned that it was dangerous to disobey a god. Yum Chaac, the friend pointed out, was the rain-god. So, swallowing his foolish pride, Toh marched along with the others.

But the Motmot was not used to hard labor. After a very short time

he became tired and hot. He watched his chance to escape, and when the Turkey Buzzard was out of sight Toh slipped away unnoticed.

Near the main entrance to the forest there was a small, dense thicket. Under this he crouched close to the ground. His body, and even his head with its long, heavy beak, were completely hidden. Although his long, fan-like tail spread across the narrow path, so well did it blend with the colorful surroundings that Toh was sure he would escape the watchful eye of the guard. Without a care on his mind, Toh soon fell fast asleep.

All this time the blue of the sky had blackened with solid, heavy clouds. A moist breeze stirred and came to life. It blew softly at first, but soon gained speed.

Suddenly a flash of lightning twisted and wandered across the darkened sky. The deafening sound of thunder echoed through the forest with terrifying nearness. Great drops of rain began to fall.

Panic stricken, the animals of the forest ran in all directions, crazed by the continuous roar of thunder. Trampling everything that blocked their way to safety, many of them dashed out of the forest along the narrow path over which spread the tail of the sleeping Motmot.



The Motmot was preening his beautiful feathers when a friend warned him not to disobey a god.

It was broad daylight when Toh awakened the next day. The storm had passed. Birds were singing gay welcomes to the bright sun.

Toh thought of the friends whom he met every morning, and, wondered how they had survived the long hours of unaccustomed work. Lazily he stretched one wing. Then he stretched the other. With considerable effort, he lifted his body out of the mire and flew to the gathering place of his chums.

No sooner had he alighted on his usual perch under the blossoming bower than a sudden burst of laughter made him stiffen in surprise.

“Your tail!” his cronies screamed between fits of laughter. “Your beautiful tail is ruined!”

Toh did not understand what they meant, and commenced to laugh with them. The noisy birds gathered around him, shrieking with mirth and pointing with mocking gestures at his tail.

Still not understanding the cause of their merriment, Toh looked backward.

One blood-curdling shriek followed another as he beheld the damage that had been done to his splendid tail. He no longer was the Royal Bird of Mayab. For of all the former long, thickly-barbed feathers of his spreading fantail, only two bare quills remained, each with an oval-shaped tip.

To escape the ridicule of his former chums, Toh, the Motmot, flew deep into the forest. And in the gloomiest part, where sunshine rarely entered, he made his home.

And now, O Gracious Prince, the Motmot lives in solitude. He builds his nest in the holes of trees, and he is never seen in the company of any other birds than his mate and their young.

Na Dzul thanked the Old Woman of Mani, and handed her a gift. A beautiful vase of many colors was his chosen offering. With a teasing lift of his eye, the little prince took the hand of his nurse, the noble lady, and they departed before the Old Woman of Mani had a chance to refuse his valuable present.