

# Fortuna's Horn

by RV Staff Writer J.C.

It was late autumn when the trees shed their multi-colored leaves, creating a jeweled patchwork carpet on the forest floor.

All the plants had finished producing their flowers and fruits, and most of the woodland creatures had smartly stashed their food and nuts away for the impending winter.

The forest was usually peaceful this time of year. The animals were keeping themselves busy preparing for colder weather and hibernation. They were filling up their food stores and making warm dens, burrows, warrens, setts, or nests.

Unfortunately, there was one group who had left their planning a little too late: the badgers. Because they liked to eat birds' eggs and grubs, they did not think about storing roots and fruit as much as the other small animals. But as the food became harder to find, a small group of badgers decided they needed more than they had. Pandareus was their leader: a greedy male who never seemed to get enough to eat, and strangely never got indigestion from it. He commanded his group to steal from the skunks, rabbits, squirrels, and chipmunks.

As the different groups tried to defend their supplies, skirmishes broke out between them. After a brief scuffle, the badgers would slink off, sometimes with bits of food in their mouths; sometimes with nothing. The tranquillity that had once reigned over the woods was broken.

A plucky little chipmunk named Macawi watched these clashes with dismay. She didn't like to see the forest creatures behaving in such a manner. It was wrong of one group to try and take what wasn't theirs, certainly. But even with winter approaching, there was still enough food to go around for all. Why couldn't they share in nature's bounty?

Macawi had been working hard these past months. She had filled her generous cheek pouches with nuts and seeds, gathering and storing pounds of food. It would keep her nicely fed well past the worst of winter, and until the snow started melting away. She thought she had plenty to share, so she invited the badgers to come to her burrow and help themselves to her supplies.

They came, and they were as greedy as thieves. Each badger carried off as much as he could, and then would come back for more. Macawi was happy to share. She knew they needed the food to get through the winter as much as she did. So, she gave and gave until she had nothing left for herself. When the last of her food stores were depleted, she sighed and curled up into a ball to get some rest. She was going to have to work extra hard over the next few days to gather more.

In the heavens above, unnoticed by earthly mortals, a certain ethereal spirit observed the scene unfolding in the forest below. She was not pleased. Sharing what you have is wonderful, and accepting help gratefully is a beautiful thing. But when one gives until her larder is bare, and the

other takes until his is overflowing, it was simply not fair. That was enough of that, thought Fortuna. It was time to intervene. She pointed an elegant finger toward the forest.

As Pandareus packed his sett with food that did not belong to him, nibbling all the while, he stopped. As suddenly as a stroke of lightning, he felt a terrible, instant pain in his stomach. What was that? He never got an upset stomach, even after a large feasting of grubs. As he sat, rubbing his tummy, he thought about all the food he had taken. He felt ashamed of himself. He realized he had taken too much from the charitable chipmunk, and left her with nothing. His heart was filled with regret for what he had done.

Even though it was not yet morning, a glowing light began to shine outside of Macawi's burrow. It woke her, and she blinked her dark eyes. The chipmunk ventured outside. She was surprised to see a stunning, golden female figure waiting for her.

Fortuna smiled radiantly at the little creature. "Don't be afraid," she said as Macawi trembled, unsure whether to run or hide. "I have descended from the heavens to thank you for being so giving. Because of your kind heart and love for your neighbor, you were able to find a path to peace when others around you only saw battle as a solution."

The chipmunk's considerable cheeks blushed at the compliment. She didn't know what to say, and bowed her head, nodding to Fortuna in humble thanks.

"I have a gift for you. It is my cornucopia—a magical horn that will provide you with the endless bounty of a fall harvest all year long. It will never be empty. It is my wish for you to have it. You have given away everything to help others. I give thanks for such an altruistic heart as yours."

The chipmunk bravely raised her eyes to Fortuna. They widened in wonder as she saw the enormous curved hollow horn in the arms of the goddess. As Fortuna laid it down under a nearby tree, Macawi noticed that it was brimming with an abundance of fruits, nuts, berries, and vegetables.

"I don't know how to thank you," she said. "I can't possibly keep this for myself. May I share with the other forest animals?"

"Bless your heart," said Fortuna. She smiled once more as she began fading from human form into a shadow that swirled and twinkled with golden points of light. She was gone as quickly as she had appeared.

The crunch of rustling leaves made Macawi turn. She saw Pandareus, stumbling under the weight of the food he was carrying. When he got close, he put it down and spoke. "I'm so embarrassed," he began. "I accepted your goodwill but then I took advantage of it. I wanted to say I am sorry, and bring back the food that I have taken—" He noticed the chipmunk was smiling. It confused him.

"I thank you very much for your apology," she interrupted. "It means a lot to me, and I accept it. But something wonderful has happened! We will have more than enough food for all the animals in the woods this winter! And every winter after that!" Macawi's little face was lit with excitement. "Tonight, we can have a great feast all together to celebrate!"



**Questions**

1. Find one simile and explain its meaning.
2. What are the names of two animal homes listed in the story?
3. What does abundance mean in the phrase, "it was brimming with an abundance of fruits, nuts, berries, and vegetables"?
4. Why did Fortuna give Macawi her cornucopia?