

TEN WORD TALES No. 6
Quest for a Quetzal
by The Story Spinner

CHAPTER 4



The dark of the forest was punctuated by the flicker of torches. The crescent moon was a thin slice of light in the sky. Dawn would come soon. Javier was worried Alanza was too hopeful. “I expect the tourist got confused or mixed up about the colours.” Alanza knew he was right. “But new birds are possible, aren’t they, Dad? So it might exist.”

They walked down to the very edge of the reserve where Alanza had seen quetzals before. They would walk in zigzags, checking the trees with their binoculars. Each zig and each zag was about 2 kilometres

long, so it would take a long time.

Just before sunrise came the sound of the forest waking: squeaking, tweeting, warbling, rustling, whooping, whistling and trilling.

Alanza checked her quetzal trees. She saw two ordinary quetzals, perched and quiet, nothing out of the ordinary.

They zigzagged steadily, stopping constantly to train their binoculars on every tree they could see and listen for the long hoo-ooping quetzal-voice. They checked-in with the professor regularly and paused for snacks. They sometimes saw something unusually red or the flick of a long tail or a flurry of turquoise feathers but in the end, every bird was a bird they knew. By noon, Alanza was tired.

“Have a rest while I check-in,” said her dad. The air was full of the fluttery hum of hummingbirds gathering nectar from bushes in a clearing nearby, shrilling over the sweetest flowers. Alanza picked up her binoculars to see them better. She followed a purple-throated woodstar to a tree. The next moment she had leapt to her feet and was walking in the very slowest slow motion towards the tree. What had she seen? Was she imagining it? There, high in the tree, sitting quite calmly, was a quetzal with a red crest, back and tail, a turquoise chest. Yes. YES