The strange creature that appeared on the farm the next day sounded nothing like Uncle Earl, so Floydarina saw no harm in tormenting it to death. It was a squirrel-like in appearance, though smaller than the grey squirrels that frequented the farm. It smelled more like possum that squirrel to Floydarina.

“Daoun’ ‘urt mae blaize. “Oy’m just peyasang threau an’ Oy daun’ maen any ‘arm to anyone an Oy daun' wanna doiy!”

Floydarina couldn’t understand a word the creature said, and in case you can't either, gentle reader, it was this: “Don’t hurt me. I’m just passing through and I don’t want to hurt anyone, and I don't want to die!”

She had the creature pinned to a shelf in the carport. She lifted a paw and peered at it, waiting for it to run. To her dissappointment, it did not. Instead, it stood up, brushed its disheveled furr back into place and started off.

“Their’s a good Shayla,” said the creature. “Oi”ll just bey on mey wai niauw.”

Floydarina blocked it with a paw. She narrowed her eyes at it. “What sort of a squirrel are you and why do you smell like possum?” she querried.

“Oi’m neau squirell. Oi’m a sugar gloider, oui eyam,” said the sugar glider. “Oy'm from Australia, Oy iam.”

“A possum squirrel, eh? That’s what I thought. Won’t everybody be proud of me when they see I’ve caught a possum squirrel. Now, should I kill you then go show you off, or should I show you off then kill you?”

“Shiauw mae off and then gell mae!” pleaded the sugar glider. “Shiauw mae off then gell mae!”

“I suppose I willl,” said Floydarina, who was getting better at understanding the creature, and so you the reader can do likewise, gentle reader, I will dispense with further attempts to write a phonetic Austrailian accent.

“That’s a good Sheila,” said the Sugar Glider. Floydarina picked him up roughly by his neck and carried him off.

“See and be impressed,” said Floydarina. “I have captured a possum squirrel.”

Floydarina was perched on the table on the deck with her possum squirrel on display. Huggins and Klutin were duly impressed.

“We want the possum squirrel, we want the possum squirrel,” they pleaded.

“It’s mine,” said Floydarina, giving Klutin three solid whacks on his nose with her balled up fist. “I found it and I get to kill it.”

“I know that creature,” said Beaufore. “It’s Aunt Claire’s sugar glider. It must have escaped her.”

“Please, please don’t let her eat me,” said the sugar glider. “I didn’t mean any harm, I promise!”

“What are you doing here, anyway?” acffd76vmyesked Beaufore.

“Oi’m on an ‘erau’s journey, Oi eyam.”

“A hero’s journey?”

“I’m off to foind the Wise Old Bird. You see, I’m a gliding animal, loik the floiying squirrels you yanks ‘ave. Only Oi’m afraid to gloid. The thought of it sends shivers up and down me spoin, it does. Seau Oi’m off to see the Wise Old Bird. E’ll straighten me out.”

“The Wise Old Bird? Maybe he can help me win the heart of my lady fair,” said Cereno the turtle.

“Beaufore!” cried Huggins. “I’ll bet he can tell you what kind of dog you are!”

“How do we find the wise old bird?” asked Beaufore.

“It should be pretty ayesay,” said Reggie. “It lives in the great chestnut – the largest in the land.”

“Cerino, how big are chestnut trees?”

“Well, they get to be huge. I hatched in the ring left by the trunk of one that fell many many years ago. Three humans joinings hands wouldn’t be able to circle it. But …”

“We can find a tree that big,” declared Beaufore. “Let’s go!”

And so Beaufore, Cerino, and Frederick the sugar glider set off in search of the largest chestnut tree in the forest there to find the Wise Old Bird. Mosey’s farm was of about 200 acres, which was barely big enough to have a hero’s journey in.

A field of about five acres separated the farm houses from a forested area that had some pretty large trees, and it took Cerino some time to cross it. By the time he had Beafore intercepted him.

“Not there,” said Beaufore. “We checked. Come on, we’ll check across the pond.”

“But …” said Cerino.

Beaufore, Reggie on his back, took off in the other direction at his lumbering trot, Reggie on his back.

Cerino watched them disappear then continued the direction he’d been going.

A few minutes later Beaufore and Reggie returned.

“We searched the woods on the other side of the orchard. Not there either. We’re going back for a nap, then we’ll check the other side of the creek.”

“But …” said Cerino.

Beaufore awoke rested and he and Reggie were off again. They went across the creek, through a bog, and over a narrow strip of overgrown pasture.

“’Av wai aiven come to any chestnut trais?” asked Regie. “What do thai aiven look loik?”

“Don’t know, Cerino. Maybe we should find out what a chestnut tree looks like. We could ask Wes when he gets home.”

“What we need,” said Reggie, “is a native woodland creature. They’d be sure to know about the trees around here.”

Reggie attempted to speak to some squirrels but they were involved in an argument among themselves and rudely dispmissed Reggie as a “friend of dogs.” Beaufore began tracking a rabbit. It flushed from a brush pile and was gone.

“You know,” said Reggie. “A box turtle is a native woodland creature. Maybe our friend Cerino can show us a chestnut tree.”

Cerino had passed through the copse of trees they’d left him at and had had made it half way across a crop field. They found him in the middle. He was cowering under the shadow of a giant, hovering hawk. Hawks do not require sophisticated aerobatics to catch a box turtle in an open field. It did not swoop down and scoop up Cerino. It eased itself casually to the ground in front of Cerino and fixed upon him a deep, menacing gaze. Cerino was not paralyzed by that gaze because he did not meet it. He closed himself up tightly in his shell.

“Look upon me, turtle. Look upon death!””

Faint whimpering came from the closed shell. The hawk siezed it, spread its great wings and made ready to heave itself skyward. Then came a sound came from behind.

“You leave moi friend alone, you red-tailed bully!”

The hawk turned to see some sort of puff-tailed chipmunk galloping toward it on a large, lumbering, arthritic poodle. The hawk cried out in rage, dropped the turtle and took flight.

“That’s roit, flee!” cried Reggie.

“This isn’t over,” cried the hawk as it disappeared from sight. “This is not over!”

“It’s OK, Cerino. You’re safe,” said the winded Beaufore.

“Oh, thank you! Thank you!” cried the turtle. “You’ve saved my life.”

“We did at that,” said Cerino. “What were you doing out here anyway? There are no big trees over here.”

“You didn’t let me finish,” said Cerino. “There used to be huge chestnut trees everywhere, but they’re all dead now. Sometimes you see young trees growing from their trunks, but they die before the get very bit.”

“Where are we going?” asked Beaufore.

“To the nest I hatched from,” said Cerino. “And we’re here.”

The great chestnut tree that once stood there had all but gone to earth. A broken ring of moss-grown wood market its outline and a single sapling grew nearby. It was about 20 feet tall and hardly thicker than a quarter. Perched regally on the top was a great horned owl who’s bearing was diminished considerably by the fact that the sapling on which he was perched was entirely too small for him, and it bent pitiously under his weight.

“Who comes before me!” commanded the owl.

“We’re three travelers,” answered Beaufore. “We come seeking knowledge.”

“That was good thinking,” said the Wise Old Bird. “I am very smart. Now what offerings do you bring?”

“Offerings? Yes, offerings … ” Beaufore said blankly. He who looked at Reggie, who looked at Cerino.

“If it pleases you, great one,” said Cerino, “our offerings are the ordeals and perils we gladly endured in order to enter into your presence. For we stand before you now in culmination of our hero’s journy, and as the object of such, you join the ranks of the great seers and profits of old, and like them, your renown will ring through the years.”

“A hero’s journey, eh? How intriguing. Tell me about the ordeals and perils.”

“This very day found me in the grasp of a deadly hawk,” said Cerino. “I could feel its breath as it hissed dire threats and gloated over my fear, and there wasn’t a whisker between me and a horrible death.”

“Indeed you have passed through the shadow of death on you way here,” the owl reflected.

“Some squirrels were rude to me,” said Reggie.

“Chilling,” said the owl.

It meant to carry me to its nest and devour me, and it would have, too, but for the timely intervention of my friends.”

“These are authentic Anderson County hazelnuts,” said Earl to a passerby at the Nashvanooga Farmer’s Market.

“Anderson County hazelnuts?” said the shopper. “Is that a real thing?”

“Oh, you bet it’s a real thing. It says it right there on the sticker.”

And indeed it did, for Earl had painstakingly attached to each hazelnut a small sticker that said ‘Anderson County.”

He found rolls and rolls of peal-off stickers in a box when they were cleaning the carport after the disaster of spray paint and dogs. Earl couldn’t imagine what sort of closeout sale it was where Mosey had found the stickers, but there they were in a box, along with a roll that said ‘Grainger County Tomatoes.’h

Earl paused at the cleaning and reflected upon the importance of branding. He thought about the orchard his father had planded many years ago. He planted only hazelnut trees. He had been a celebrated visionary, Mr. Reggie Hooper. Retired from his corporate job to sell sented candles in craft fairs back in the 70s, and ended up with a building a factory and selling candles all over the country. He sold just before the bottom dropped out of the industry and put his money in real estate just at the start of a huge real estate boom in that sector.

Reggie Hooper made all the right moves at all the right times and near the end of his life poured all his effort and entergy into an orchard of hazelnuts and only hazelnuts.

“Well, he never has missed,” said the family. They waited for the event that would create a lucrative market for Tennessee hazelnuts, some blight that would destroy the great orchards of the Pacific Northwest, the discovery of some hazelnut extract that cured male pattern baldness. They waited and waited, but there was never even so much as a fad diet.