

## The Woodcutter's Child

by Manuela Williams Crosno

"How is it," Gomez asked his wife, "that the Verlados have a child with hair like gold?"

This *had* come about in a strange way. This is the story.

**E**nrique Verlado was a woodcutter. He lived with his wife, Maria, in a cabin he had built at the edge of a small canyon. Crops were planted in a narrow valley between the canyon walls. A stream, fresh from the mountains, brought water to these fields.

Morning glories, with large blue blossoms, trailed around the cabin windows. Pink and white hollyhocks grew beside the wall. Pots of red geraniums stood in the windows. There were lace curtains behind them.

Soon after the woodcutter married, the canyon began to glow with a bronze color at each sunset. This may have been caused by the sunlight. It was reflected against the rust and orange rocks of the east canyon wall. The whole valley—grass, cabin, trees, the stream, even Maria and Enrique—became a copper painting at sunset.

Near the top of the canyon wall was a narrow road. Sometimes, those who traveled this road would look into the canyon at sunset. Then they would exclaim, "Look! A bronze cabin! How beautiful!"

Maria and Enrique traveled their own path and dreamed their own dreams. One of those dreams was to have a child. As they danced and sang, they told themselves there would be children, *niños*, one day. The canyon walls echoed with happy laughter.

Enrique spent most of his days in the forest. He would thin out the brush, or chop down dead trees. These he sold for firewood in a nearby village. Sometimes, he would lie under a tree and watch the sky through the pine needles. The wind blew soft and golden clouds across the mesas.



"There is no better place than this to raise a child," Enrique often said. Maria and Enrique were very happy.

As time passed, however, they laughed less and smiled seldom. Finally, they no longer smiled at all. This was because they had no children. Gomez, who lived near them, had seven *niños*, all with straight, blue-black hair and shiny-black eyes. But Maria and Enrique Verlado had not even one child.

Sadness aged them, and the days dragged slowly by. The lace curtains became torn and stained. Sand filled the garden. The hollyhocks came up thin and frail, in ones and twos. The geraniums wilted at the window sills. And no blue morning glories brightened the cabin.

One evening as Maria was herding goats toward the corral, she found, on the grass, a yellow scarf. It gleamed like sunshine. Now and then, something fell into the canyon from the high road above. But this scarf looked as though it had traveled a great distance—like a seed which has been carried by the wind. Indeed, Maria did find a seed tied tightly in a corner of the scarf.

Maria held the seed in her hand and examined it closely. She decided that it was a hollyhock seed. Then she planted it in the garden close to the cabin door.

The scarf seemed to be woven of a shimmering silk. Maria wrapped it around her hair. When Enrique came home, she told him about the seed. With the bright yellow scarf on her black hair, Maria looked very beautiful.

In a few days, a green stalk appeared in the garden where the seed had

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been planted. Maria took a great interest in this seedling. She was reminded of hollyhocks she had planted in happier days.

Maria watered the stalk and put fresh soil around its roots. She carefully removed the old, sandy soil which makes a plant struggle to live. It seemed to Maria that this hollyhock was different from any she had ever planted.

This strange plant brought a new delight to the woodcutter and his wife. But they did not mention the plant to their neighbor, Gomez. Some years before, he had said that the Verlados raised hollyhocks instead of children. This had saddened and angered Maria and Enrique.

Before long, the hollyhock reached above the roof of the cabin. The plant had many branches with small buds. When they blossomed one day, the flowers shone brightly in the sunlight. Maria noticed that the flowers were the same color as the yellow scarf she wore.

So the plant was not a hollyhock after all! Its blossoms were like cups of fluffy gold, the color of clouds at sunset. Maria and Enrique were strangely happy. Once more the canyon walls echoed with their laughter.

Late one night, when only the wind was moving, there came a knocking at the door. The woodcutter opened it and looked about. Seeing nothing, he returned to his bed. As Enrique watched the moonlight make patterns on the floor, he wondered what the sound could have been. Just then, he heard the knocking again. Enrique hurried to the door and opened it. He looked about until his eyes became **accustomed** to the moonlight. Near the door he found a basket, which he took into the cabin.

He called Maria. Together they removed a baby from the basket.

The woodcutter dressed hastily and went outside to look about. At the same time, Maria began to care for the child. The baby was wrapped in a golden blanket. It seemed to Maria that the blanket was made of the same material as the scarf. It was surely the same color. As for the basket, Maria had never seen one like it before. Its color was bronze.

Outside, Enrique heard nothing but the soft "swishhh" of wind in the pines. He could see or hear nothing unusual. But the moonlight! Never before had he seen moonlight fill the canyon with the color of sunset bronze. Puzzled, Enrique ran his fingers through his curly, black hair. Could it be that his eyes were **deceiving** him? He walked down the path for a distance. The

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breeze seemed to be filled with the scent of golden flowers. Seeing no one, Enrique returned to the cabin.

The baby, a boy, was very beautiful. He had blue eyes and fair skin. His hair was the color of golden flowers. It lay in curls all over his head.

Maria and Enrique knew at once that they wanted to keep the child forever. For weeks, indeed months, they kept the baby out of sight. They trembled whenever a stranger approached the cabin.

Finally, they felt certain that the child belonged to them. They reasoned that it had come about, somehow, because of the scarf, the seed, and the golden plant. It was difficult to understand. But somehow they had been given what they wanted most. This was not an abandoned baby left at their doorstep! This child had been given to them. It was really theirs!

One night Maria dreamed that the child's name was *Felicidad*. This was their word for happiness. No longer afraid now, they told everyone that Felicidad was their child.

When Gomez saw the baby, however, he became suspicious. "This boy does not belong to the Verlados," he told his wife. There were whispers, started by Gomez, that Enrique and Maria had stolen the child. But the woodcutter and his wife refused to allow themselves to be worried.

"Happiness," Maria said, "cannot be taken from those who appreciate it."

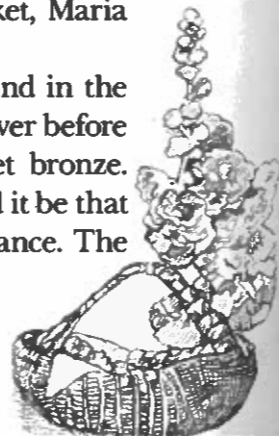
A year quickly passed by. Except for Gomez, people stopped saying that the baby was not theirs. And Maria and Enrique no longer worried that someone would suddenly appear to claim the child.

Never before had the woodcutter and his wife been so happy. By day white clouds floated over the canyon. And at sunset the bronze color came and went. Maria smiled while she worked with the child close by. Enrique sang all day as he cut the wood.

Maria made new curtains and replaced the geraniums. Enrique painted the window frames blue and repaired his wagon. Life was good in the canyon.

The days were blown away with the speed of winds. Soon three years had passed. Maria and Enrique wanted nothing more. They did not think it strange that the child did not speak. For the little boy with the golden hair smiled and laughed a great deal.

One day the woodcutter arrived home early. He did not have his usual



song and smile of greeting. Maria did not question Enrique while they ate. She sat in silence and looked out the window. She noticed that, for the first time, the sun did not color the canyon. Maria found this puzzling. But she did not mention it to her husband.

After the child was asleep, she asked, "What's wrong? What's going on?"

"It is Gomez," said Enrique in an angry voice. "He is saying that if the child is ours, why do we not have more children. I wish for another child!"

Maria tried to comfort Enrique. She replied, "It does not matter what anyone says. Are we not happy—more happy than Gomez with all his children? Ask Gomez why *he* does not have a child with hair like gold."

Nervously, Maria removed her scarf and twisted it. Then she looked at the scarf, knotted in her hands. She wondered if it were beginning to fade.

But Enrique would not be comforted. And he would not forget what Gomez had said. It bothered him more and more. Maria, too, began to wish for another child. This would make her husband content.

And so the woodcutter and his wife grew unhappy again. The lace curtains began to fade. Sand filled the garden once more. The geraniums began to wilt. And Maria began to neglect the golden plant near the door. She did not water it for days. She forgot to give it fresh soil.

The sun shone on the canyon wall. But the bronze glow had disappeared, and the canyon seemed dreary and dull. And one morning, the plant with the flowers of gold was found suddenly uprooted.

With each day, the woodcutter and his wife grew sadder. Still, Felicidad remained cheerful. But even the boy could no longer bring them happiness. It served to remind them that they had only one child.

One night, Enrique was awakened by a hand tugging at his sleeve. A startled Maria was speaking to him.

"Come with me," she said. She took him by the hand and drew him to the child's room. When they entered, Enrique saw an empty bed.

They dashed to the door and threw it open. As far down the road as they could see, there was nothing. The breeze stirred the pine needles, and the moon shone between the passing clouds.

The woodcutter and his wife stood silently in the doorway without moving. It was as if they were changed to stone.

Felicidad was gone!

**GETTING THE MEANING OF THE STORY.** Complete each of the following sentences by putting an *x* in the box next to the correct answer. Each sentence helps you get the meaning of the story.

1. As Maria was herding goats one evening, she found a  
 a. hat.  
 b. scarf.  
 c. pot of flowers.
2. For months, the Verlados kept the child hidden because they  
 a. were afraid that someone would claim him.  
 b. didn't want anyone to see how weak and sickly he was.  
 c. thought that the baby would be frightened by strangers.
3. Gomez told people that Maria and Enrique  
 a. were very happy.  
 b. would soon leave the canyon.  
 c. had stolen the child.
4. As the woodcutter and his wife grew sadder, Felicidad  
 a. also grew sadder.  
 b. refused to eat.  
 c. remained cheerful.

× 5 =   
NUMBER CORRECT      YOUR SCORE

**REVIEWING STORY ELEMENTS.** Each of the following questions reviews your understanding of story elements. Put an *x* in the box next to the correct answer to each question.

1. Where is "The Woodcutter's Child" *set*?  
 a. in a canyon  
 b. on a mountaintop  
 c. in a desert
2. What happened last in the *plot* of the story?  
 a. Maria planted the seed she found.  
 b. The woodcutter and his wife discovered that Felicidad was gone.  
 c. Enrique and Maria began to wish for another child.
3. Which sentence best *characterizes* both Maria and Enrique?  
 a. They never smiled or sang because they were poor and life was hard.  
 b. They were filled with happiness during their first three years with Felicidad.  
 c. They did not think that they lived in a good place to raise a child.
4. Pick the sentence that best tells the *theme* of the story.  
 a. Bright flowers and lace curtains help to cheer up an unhappy couple.  
 b. A scarf brings a couple bad luck.  
 c. When a couple cannot be satisfied with the happiness they have been given, they lose that happiness.

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**EXAMINING VOCABULARY WORDS.** Answer the following vocabulary questions by putting an *x* in the box next to the correct answer. The vocabulary words are printed in **boldface** in the story. If you wish, look back at the words before you answer the questions.

- The flowers in the garden came up weak and frail. Which of the following best defines (gives the meaning of) the word *frail*?
  - a. in good health
  - b. easily broken
  - c. huge
- Enrique was puzzled, and wondered if his eyes were deceiving him. The word *deceiving* means
  - a. tricking.
  - b. approaching.
  - c. asking.
- Maria began to neglect the plant near the door; she did not water it for days. What is the meaning of *neglect*?
  - a. to give praise to
  - b. to take good care of
  - c. to fail to care for
- The woodcutter looked about until his eyes became accustomed to the light. The word *accustomed* means
  - a. familiar with or used to.
  - b. upset with or troubled by.
  - c. surprised by or shocked at.

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**ADDING WORDS TO A PASSAGE.** Complete the following paragraph by filling in each blank with one of the words listed in the box below. Each of the words appears in the story. Since there are five words and four blanks, one word in the group will not be used.

A deep valley with steep sides is called a                     <sup>1</sup>. Some canyons are famous because they are so                     <sup>2</sup> to look at. One of these is the Grand Canyon in Arizona. As the light changes during the day, the colors of the many                     <sup>3</sup> there also change. They glisten orange, pink,                     <sup>4</sup>, green, and red in the sun.

beautiful	canyon
yellow	
cabin	rocks

× 5 =   
 NUMBER CORRECT      YOUR SCORE

**THINKING ABOUT THE STORY.** Each of the following questions will help you to think critically about the selection. Put an *x* in the box next to the correct answer.

- Probably, the Verlados were afraid that people might think that the baby was not theirs because
  - a. Maria and Enrique always said that they didn't want any children.
  - b. everyone knew that the Verlados couldn't afford to support a child.
  - c. Maria and Enrique had black hair, but the baby had golden curls.
- Which statement is true?
  - a. Gomez was not a good neighbor.
  - b. Gomez was a very helpful neighbor.
  - c. From the moment they saw the baby, Maria and Enrique did not like it.
- When the Verlados grew unhappy, they
  - a. went to dances to cheer themselves up.
  - b. no longer took good care of their home and their garden.
  - c. worked harder than ever to keep themselves busy.
- Probably, Maria and Enrique will
  - a. see Felicidad one more time.
  - b. see Felicidad often in the future.
  - c. never see Felicidad again.

× 5 =   
 NUMBER CORRECT      YOUR SCORE

**Thinking More about the Story.** Your teacher might want you to write your answers.

- The child in the story is named *Felicidad*, the Spanish word for "happiness." Why do you think the author chose this name? Explain your answer in detail.
- If Enrique and Maria had remained happy, do you think Felicidad would have disappeared? Explain your answer.
- The colors bronze, yellow, and gold play an important part in "The Woodcutter's Child." Give examples from the story to support this statement.

Use the boxes below to total your scores for the exercises.

<input type="text"/>	<b>G</b> ETTING THE MEANING OF THE STORY
+	
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<input type="text"/>	<b>E</b> XAMINING VOCABULARY WORDS
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**Score Total:** Story 14