

Kookaburra Clare

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Kookaburra Clare was the most forgetful animal in the whole town of animals. She always forgot how to work the TV, and how to tie her shoes, and how to sleep, and how to touch her toes without bending her knees, and how to play the piano, and how to say hi in French. But there was one thing Kookaburra Clare never forgot, and that was her fears.

Kookaburra Clare was an incredibly fearful animal. She was scared of grumpy old Wally the wombat, who always sat in his chair on the deck and watched animals going past, grunting at everyone. She was terrified of the undistinguishable sloppy stew her grandma made on Sundays, and she was afraid of the colour purple. She was frightened of the loud humans occasionally walking by, and of the big flashy things they always clicked at them. She was scared of everything, far too many to include here. But most of all, she was terrified of falling off the edge of the world.

Because she had forgotten everything they taught her at school, she was sure that the world was flat, and that if you walked too far, you could go right off the edge of it and never be seen again. She had nightmares about walking along the edge of the world and then tripping and falling through the air and never landing. She never flew for long because she was scared that without knowing she would fly off the edge of the world and then forget how to turn around or fly back up. But the fact that she never flew was slightly annoying for her.

Every few months there was a massive flying event when all of the birds would fly and fly for days on end called the Fantastic Flying Festival. Kookaburra Clare always watched them until they were out of sight. It was an incredible thing to see, a huge colourful cloud wafting through the sky. All the birds from near and far came together to fly across the country on a huge adventure. Magpies, rosellas, owls, cockatoos, crows, bluebirds, wattlebirds, galahs, cockatiels, king fishers, eagles, pigeons, tawny frogmouths, seagulls, parrots, finches, even a pelican or two all came. And all of the kookaburras. So many kookaburras. Kookaburra Clare's whole family went, so did every kookaburra in the whole town. Even Kookaburra Clare's grandmother went.

"Nothing's going to stop these old wings from flying!" she'd squawk in her shrill voice when animals asked her about it.

This meant that Kookaburra Clare had to go stay at Karen Koala's house when the birds left. Kookaburra Clare didn't mind Karen Koala, it's just that she was so lazy. She always wanted to spend the whole day in the trees napping. But her ears were pretty. They were huge and silky. Kookaburra Clare wished she had ears like that, but knew that they'd look ridiculous on her.

She always felt lonely, being the only bird in town for a few days, but tried not to regret her decision.

One day, she thought, one day, a bird flying in the Fantastic Flying Festival will fly off the edge of the world. And then they'll thank me for warning them.

And warn the birds she did. In the following weeks of a Fantastic Flying Festival, she would run around the school, her Fight the Flight headband firmly strapped around her forehead, plastering the walls and windows with her handmade posters which were basically blank pieces of paper that she had scrawled across in her favourite green marker; DON'T FLY IN THE FATAL FLYING FESTIVAL!

The poor kookaburra always organised numerous protests against the festival, however, because all the birds thought the flight festival was great fun and a brilliant opportunity to go on an awesome sightseeing trip with your friend, she never managed to get anyone to come. Not even herself, because she always forgot that it was on.

At school there was always heaps of lessons on flying to prepare the students for the festival. But these lessons, Clare never forgot. The truth was, Kookaburra Clare was a wonderful flyer. She could fly numerous laps of the extended flying track around the oval without doubling over at the end with breathlessness. She easily won every flying race the school held. She knew all the coolest tricks and spent all her lunchtimes surrounded by a crowd of awestruck birds and showing off her tricks, flipping and twisting and spinning like a trained dolphin in mid-air.

The truth was, she loved flying as well. She adored the exhilaration of dipping and twirling and skimming the ground, her belly so close to the ground it was almost giving her stomach fluff a haircut, and the rush of air in her face, and gliding through the air gracefully, and that feeling of freedom. And the truth was, she dreamed about the exciting expedition that the Fantastic Flyers got to experience, and all the wondrous adventures they would go on. And the truth was, it was only her fear holding her back from lining up at the start line and setting off on the journey of a lifetime; the Fantastic Flying Festival, with all those other brave birds.

One day though, two weeks before the massive flock of birds rose into the sky to start their adventure, in the schoolyard, a revolutionary event for Kookaburra Clare was about to take place. The harsh Australian sun beat down on St Borison's School for Birds, and a cluster of a wide variety of bird species, from a tiny sparrow to a bulky cockatoo, gathered next to a long starting line painted into the concrete ground, anxiously watching 2 birds next to each other, a kookaburra and a pelican, an amusing sight with their incomparable size and beak length (it was like seeing an ant paired with a giraffe), one foot planted firmly on the line. Kookaburra Clare felt half the class's eyes burrowing into her, and the pressure was laid on her like a heavy blanket. She focused on the end of the track, a good few hundred metres away. She could feel the confidence emitting out of her competitor, Patrick Pelican, as he jerked his giant beak into the air. She gulped, and hoped he couldn't hear the heavy thudding of her heart. Patrick Pelican was the most assertive bird in class, and it was just her luck that she had to race Patrick. Patrick was the fastest boy in the class, probably the school, and she was the fastest girl in the class, so they were chosen to represent their genders. But why, oh why, did Patrick have to be in Kookaburra Clare's class?

“You got this, Clare!” her best friend Riley Rosella called from the sidelines. Kookaburra Clare managed a wry grin at her friend’s encouragement. Suddenly, the PE teacher Mr Magpie raised his pistol.

“On your marks-’ he announced. Kookaburra Clare and Patrick Pelican leant forward and spread their wings.

“Get set-’ he boomed, his voice wavering, waiting to scream out the words, like a balloon itching to pop and let loose, as he raised the pistol to the sky. Patrick and Clare flinched with the suspension.

“GO!” Mr Magpie bellowed, pulling the trigger of his pistol and unleashed a huge BANG in the sky. He quickly fumbled for his whistle for good measure and blew so hard into it the class’s wings immediately flew to cover their heads and his face turned the colour of an especially juicy plum with the effort.

Kookaburra Clare’s wings were a frantic blue and brown blur by her sides, and the two determined birds rose into the sky in a frantic flurry of feathers. Kookaburra Clare rose up, up, up into the air until she was a good ten metres in the air. With a flap of her wings, she glided neatly through the air, the air gushing past her and making a deafening whoosh. She gently flapped her wings and added a burst of speed, propelling herself through the air like a jet. All too soon, the finish line came into view and she sailed to the ground, skimming the last few metres left, her belly feathers brushing against the grass, before she promptly crossed the finish line. A ginormous cheer rose in the crowd.

She took her first anxious glance at Patrick since they lined up at the start, and her heart skipped a beat and let out a whoop of delight as Patrick glided over the line, mere seconds after her. She couldn’t believe it. She, Kookaburra Clare, had beaten Patrick Pelican, in a flying race. She blushed as he landed neatly next to her, and her heart sank at the wave of dismay that flushed Patrick’s face. He glared at her and turned on his heels. But just before he strode off with his beak sticking in the air, he snapped at Kookaburra Clare’s face, so dangerously close to her she felt her face feathers flutter, and as she watched Patrick’s fat butt waddle off, she felt like she was a fraction of her normal size.

As she stumbled back across the oval to her peers, lost in thoughts, she noticed Mayor Marcus Miner bird standing by the PE teacher, chatting. Mayor Miner was dressed ostentatiously as always, in his coal-black suit and silk tie and a little black hat was balanced carefully on his tiny head. She edged closer, her spine as straight as she could make it. She could just make out the words ‘kookaburra, talented and flight festival.’ Mayor Miner suddenly spun around and noticed her sheepishly standing there, pretending not to eavesdrop by becoming very interested in an ant scuttling across the dirt.

“Kookaburra Clare!” Mayor Miner boomed. “I was just walking in to see your principal when I saw that race! Mr Magpie and I were just discussing your flight ability. My word, you have fast wings, don’t you?”

Kookaburra Clare smiled bashfully. If birds could blush she would be confused with a tomato.

“I’m sure you are looking forward to this month’s Flight Festival-” he continued. Kookaburra Clare had to interrupt him.

“Sir, I’m sorry to cut in, but I don’t think I’ll be participating.” Kookaburra Clare stammered. The mayor’s shock was obvious in his reaction.

“WHAT?” He squawked, tipping his head back so severely to yell the words that his hat slipped off his smooth head. He flapped his wings like a penguin trying to fly. So frantically he accidentally lifted himself a few metres above the ground. He lowered himself back down with a hint of awkwardness. He gathered his hat and positioned it precisely on his head then turned back to face them.

“I apologise for my overzealous response, but seriously? You’d love taking part in the Fantastic Flying Festival. What’s there to dislike?” he implied. Kookaburra Clare pondered about that for a while.

Nothing, she realised. She sighed and looked back at Mayor Miner.

“Ok, I’ll do it,” she uttered. The fully-grown miner-bird let out a shriek of excitement, sounding like a toddler presented with a magic rainbow unicorn ice-cream.

“YAY!” Mayor Miner hollered, clapping his wings together. Before she had time to change her mind, he skipped off like Little Red Riding Hood, his briefcase swinging by his side, to the principal’s office.

The dry breeze swept across the dry cracked red ground, rustling dead shrubs dotted across the plains. In the VERY DISTANT distance, so far away that all the birds couldn’t see it except for the eagle-eyed eagle, perched on a silhouette of a hill on the horizon, was a faint blue flagpole which the birds had to fly around to mark their track. Behind the starting line was a thick line of a huge variety of birds, from galahs to vultures, from macaws to falcons to cockatoos to budgies to wattlebirds. The list was never-ending. Amongst the noisy colourful atmosphere, a little kookaburra was nestled between her parents, a large backpack strapped to her back, bubbling with excitement. Mayor Miner stood, his outfit as pompous as he could make it, like always, bundled in another yellow suit and tie that were really too big for him. Under the long silk pants, he had secretly strapped stools to his feet to make himself fit his pants, but this just made his head look extremely disproportioned. He clutched a heavily polished pistol in one wing.

Suddenly, after popping on his sunglasses and giving photographers a slightly intimidating devilish smirk that he obviously thought was award-winning, he raised the pistol to the air and fired. The birds immediately rose into the sky, synchronised in movement, so they looked like one giant over-whelming colourful creature high in the sky. Kookaburra Clare straight away flew to the leaders of the massive flock, her beam lighting up her face, surveying the incredible scene. The dry, cracked ground

stretched to the horizon, the line where the sky met the earth. At this moment, she knew, that she was gonna love this trip.