



THE BOWER BIRD BLUES

It was a beautiful day. The sun was warm and the forest was buzzing, not just with bees, but also with bower birds. The boys in particular were hunting far and wide for trinkets to decorate their bowers, which, as every bird knows, is what bower birds call their homes. Each time they found something they thought might suit, they took it back to the bower and placed it where it could be seen from outside. This was important, for the idea was to make their bower look attractive for anyone passing by, especially the girl bower birds. And if they made a really good job of it, one of the girls might like the bower enough and would want to stay.

Elspeth bower bird was walking with her friend Hermione. Now, Elspeth had already found her best bower, and that was where she lived with her partner Charlie. Hermione, on the other hand, was still alone and this was what Elspeth was trying to fix. “Stop worrying, Hermione,” she chattered breezily, “I’m sure we’ll find you a boy soon. See over there,” she added, “Ambrose is back with another decoration. Isn’t he a most handsome fellow?”

“Yes, he is,” Hermione had to agree, “But just look at his bower. It’s a total mess. He has no sense of where to put ornaments, and the colours are all wrong. The only blue thing is the clothes peg he’s carrying, and that’s broken. No, I’m sorry. Ambrose really is a lovely boy, but I can’t live in a bower that doesn’t have lots of blue.” To anyone else, this might have seemed quite silly. After all, why did it matter what colour the decorations were? To live in a blue bower, however, was every girl bower bird’s dream, and Hermione was certain that if she had to stay in a bower without blue, she would absolutely hate it and all the girls would laugh at her.

Just as they were about to walk on, Ambrose noticed the girls approaching, stood to one side, spread a wing towards his bower and said proudly: “How do you like it? Coming along nicely, don’t you think?” Instead of agreeing, or even disagreeing, Hermione put her head down and hurried away without speaking. “Did I say something

wrong?” he asked Elspeth. “I do hope not. Hermione is the prettiest girl in the forest. I would just love her to come and live with me.”

Not wishing to hurt his feelings, Elspeth said: “There is something you should know, Ambrose, but I think it would be better coming from Charlie. Leave it with me and I’ll get him to have a word with you.”

Charlie returned later and Ambrose was explaining: “I thought bright was the way to go – lots of different things with different colours.”

“Lots is fine, Ambrose,” Charlie said, sighing deeply. “And different’s also good. Colour’s the problem - there’s no blue, man! It’s what the girls want, and if you don’t deliver, Hermione won’t want to know you; neither will any of the other girls and you’ll end up a very lonely bower bird.”

“I’m sure you’re right, Charlie,” Ambrose admitted sadly, “But what can I do?”

As it happened, Charlie had already talked about this with Elspeth and they had come up with a plan. Their friends were prepared to help and, in a short time, birds of all kinds were searching the forest for blue bits and pieces. Other creatures too joined in, and soon possums, mice, goannas and bandicoots were hunting high and low to help Ambrose win the heart of Hermione. After a long and busy two hours, the best anyone had come up with was a hair band and a button, both blue, but only likely to make Ambrose’s bower look bare and empty. “There’s nothing else blue left,” said Ferdinand the blue wren, “The other bower bird boys must have got there before us.”

Charlie was frowning. “We have to do something! Elspeth’s bringing Hermione here in half an hour, and I promised they’d see Ambrose’s bower fully decorated with blue. If it isn’t, Hermione won’t want Ambrose, and I dread to think what Elspeth will say.”

Ferdinand the blue wren had his head cocked on one side as he was thinking. Suddenly, he sprang into the air and flew into the bower, settling first in one place, then another. “How about this?” he said. “I’m blue, and I can perch here...” He flitted to different spot. “...And here.”

“That’s all very well,” droned Churchill the wombat, “But there’s only one of you.”

Ferdinand was stumped for a moment, then he realised something and said: “Of ME, yes, but I’m not the only blue bird in the forest.”

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“Are you excited?” asked Elspeth as the two girls walked through the forest towards Ambrose’s bower.

“Yes I am,” said Hermione, “And very nervous. What will I say if I don’t like what he’s done with his bower?”

“Just tell the truth,” Elspeth replied. “If it’s ghastly, say so; but I can’t imagine it will be, not if Charlie has done his job properly.”

As it happened, Charlie and everyone else had saved the day for Ambrose. When the girls arrived, his bower was ablaze with blue. Perched all around the entrance and inside too were blue wrens, blue jays and two blue kingfishers that had heard about the “Blue-In” and had been keen to join the party. “Oh, it’s wonderful,” declared Hermione. “I’ve never seen anything like it – there’s so much blue! How did you ever manage it in so short a time?”

“It wasn’t easy,” Ambrose admitted, “Mind you,” he paused to glance around at the other creatures, in particular the birds decorating his bower, “I did have a little help from my friends.”