

TYSON'S TALE

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MUM WOULDN'T LET ME talk to the people who came to live on the farm next to ours while Dad was away shearing last year. She said they were a bit dodgy. I don't know what she meant by that.

We didn't know Tyson lived with the dodgy neighbours till the day they were moving back to the city. Mum and I watched in amazement as they drove their VW up our drive with a cocky's cage tied to the roof. A sulphur-crested cockatoo was inside, clinging to the bars of the cage, screeching his protests all the way from the gate.

"Can you look after him for a few days, Missus?" said Mr Dodgy to Mum. "I reckon he'll be dead before we get to Sydney. He won't fit inside." He pointed to the over-stacked interior of the car. I could just see the top of Mrs Dodgy's head sticking out from behind the boxes. "He won't be no trouble." He grinned persuasively at Mum. I could see she was going to say "yes" and I was quite looking forward to getting to know this raucous creature, who was now busily preening his windblown feathers.

Mr Dodgy untied the cage from the roof of the car and handed it to me.

"I'm Tyson! Who the heck are you?" said the bird as plain as day.

"Cool," I laughed. "Hear that, Mum?"

"Go jump in the lake," said Tyson, and he made a spitting noise.

Mr Dodgy hurriedly jumped in the car and waved goodbye. "Thanks, Missus, I'll be back before the end of the week."

"That's a joke," screeched Tyson, and he made a burping sound.

"I told you they were dodgy," said Mum. "They've even taught the bird bad habits."

I still thought he was cool. I changed my mind a few minutes later when I tried to put a dish of water in his cage. He bit my finger, hard, then screeched with laughter.

"Ow!" I yelled.



“Go jump in the lake,” he told me.

Mum thought he was cranky because he was in such a little cage. “Poor thing, he can’t even spread his wings,” she said as she bathed my finger. “I think he’s bored. I wonder if he’d like to keep the chooks company?”

So we rigged a hook for him on the chookhouse and hung his cage there.

“Who the heck are you? I’m Tyson,” he called to each hen as it clucked by. The only chook that seemed interested was Billy Bob, the rooster. We think he saw Tyson as a rival; they were about the same size after all. Billy Bob started crowing loudly to show his protest at this newcomer. For a few minutes Tyson was speechless. Then he tried to imitate Billy Bob’s crow.



Mum covered her ears. “I’m not sure this was such a good idea.”

Over the next few days Tyson spent every waking minute perfecting his crow. Billy Bob retired to the chookhouse. He refused to come out and the hens went off the lay.

There was no sign of Mr Dodgy’s return.

One morning, a hungry gosling hawk chose our budgerigar aviary as a possible source of breakfast.

“Mum! I’ve got an idea,” I called. “Let’s tie Tyson’s cage to the aviary. He’ll scare the hawks away.” We’d already lost a few budgies to these predators.

“Go jump in the lake. Cock a doodle do!” objected Tyson when we lifted his cage off the hook.

“Sorry, Tyson,” Mum said. “We can’t live with the noise.”

“That’s a joke. Good riddance!” said Tyson, and he burped.

The budgies soon made it obvious that they’d prefer the hawk to this crazy, maniacal beast. Most refused to come out of their birdhouse. Any bird desperate enough to come out for a feed or a drink of water caused Tyson to go into awesome fits of laughing, crowing, spitting and burping. It was too much for the budgies.

“Wherever is your owner?” Mum sighed.

“That’s a joke. Ha ha ha,” said Tyson.

Just then I saw posh Mrs Parker-Jones coming up the drive in her flash car. Mum was hanging Tyson in the pear tree beside the front door when she arrived.

“Who the heck is this?” shouted Tyson and made his best burping noise.

“He certainly speaks plainly, Mrs Brown. Good afternoon, Samuel.” Mrs Parker-Jones looked askance as usual at my bare feet and



grubby knees. "Did you teach the galah to speak, young man? You should be careful what you say in front of him, you know."

"Go jump in the lake," said Tyson and for once I agreed with him.

"He's not a galah, he's—" I began.

"I've come about the lamington drive, Mrs Brown," Mrs Parker-Jones sniffed. "As usual I'm in charge of the fete this ye—"

"That's a joke. I'm Tyson!" The cockatoo started dancing and flashing his crest as vigorously as the small cage would allow.

"Why do you keep the poor creature in such a small cage, Samuel? Really, young man, you should—"

"Who the heck are you? Go jump!"

"How shocking! Poor bird. Here, Cocky." My least favourite neighbour went to put her finger through the bars to scratch Tyson's head.

"Don't—" Mum and I said together.

"Yeeouch!" Mrs Parker-Jones leapt back holding her bleeding finger. "That b-b-bird b-bit m-me." She looked very pale as Mum helped her into the house.

"Good riddance! Ha ha ha!" cackled Tyson.

"Right on," I told him.

"This is impossible," Mum groaned as Mrs Parker-Jones drove off at last. "We'll let him out of his cage next time that flock of wild cockatoos flies over. I don't think those Dodgys will ever come back for him."

"Cock a doodle do!" Tyson agreed.

Later that week the flock flew over and landed in the she-oaks along the creek.

"Quick, help me," called Mum.

We opened the door of Tyson's cage, but he looked at us in bewilderment and made a hissing noise.



“Come on, Tyson. Freedom. Cool. See ya.” I tried to encourage him.

Tyson began pissily preening his feathers. For once he was silent. I think he might have been a bit scared.

Mum poked him through the bars with a stick.

“Awk,” said Tyson.

Mum pushed him again.

“Awk!” He made a spitting noise and tried to spread his wings to make himself look awesomely vicious.

“Go. Go. Go.” Mum was getting frustrated. Tyson put his head under his wing. I felt sorry for him.

The wild cockatoos were squawking along the creek but I don’t think Tyson recognised them as being like him. He probably thought he was a rooster. We decided to leave his cage door open and leave him to work out his options.

An hour or so later we heard a screech and raced out just in time to see Tyson land at the top of the big poplar tree behind our shed.

“That’s a joke. Who the heck are you? Awk, awk, awk. Good riddance! Cock a doo. Cock a doo.” He was going through his whole repertoire but couldn’t remember the end of the doodle-do, he was so shocked at his new situation.

The wild flock flew off over the hill, but he made no attempt to follow.

“Rats!” said Mum. “What now?”

A whole week went by and Tyson didn’t come down from the poplar tree. He screeched abuse every time he caught sight of us, but he didn’t try to fly. Mum worried he’d die of hunger or thirst, but the fourth morning we noticed the poplar was stripped bare of leaves all around where he was perched. So he wouldn’t starve, but he

couldn't stay up there forever. What would get him down?

It was Mrs Parker-Jones's flash car that did it. She came back to pick up the lamingtons Mum had been making all week. Tyson shouted, "Who the heck are you?" and he swooped down and landed clumsily on the roof of her car, where he immediately deposited the result of living on poplar leaves for a week.

"Oh my, oh no, *never* have I . . ."

Mrs Parker-Jones grabbed the boxes of lamingtons from Mum's hands and slammed the door of the car without even saying goodbye.

"That's a joke," said Tyson as he slid off the roof of the car and perched on the side mirror. "Awk. Good riddance! Go jump!" he continued as she revved the engine, trying to scare him off. After the excitement of his first flight and a week of freedom, Tyson could handle a posh lady and her flash car no problem. He clung frantically to the mirror, screeching loudly all the way to the gate. Flying back to our pear tree, he greeted us with a laugh and began to dance and sway.

"Neat," I said.

The Dodgys never came back and Tyson never left us. He lives in the poplar tree and still out-crows the rooster every morning. He only behaves badly when Mum brings the shopping home from town. He loves the white plastic shopping bags and chases Mum from the car all the way up the hall trying to rip them open. Dad thought it was the funniest thing he'd ever seen when he first came home and found Mum furious, with her shopping scattered from the car to the kitchen. Mind you, Tyson makes Dad mad by barking like the sheepdog, ringing

like the phone and copying Dad's smoker's cough.

Tyson calls, "Sam, where are you?" and "Whatever are you doing, Sam?" and "Sam, come and feed the chooks," all as plain as day. He loves riding on side mirrors, and our visitors think it's really neat when he escorts them on and off our farm that way. We're a bit nervous when they get out of their car and he eyes their fingers hungrily, but he hasn't bitten anyone for a while.

My mates think it's awesome when they come out for the weekend and he follows us through the bush to the swimming hole. He sits in the willow and crows, burps, spits and *awks* at us. "Too cool, Sam," they say.

"Way to go, Tyson," I grin.

