



## Tabatha's Birthday Surprise

Ranger Tabatha yawned and bounced out of bed. She bounced while she changed into her ranger's uniform. She bounced while she cleaned her teeth. And she bounced while she plaited her hair. Ranger Tabatha couldn't stop bouncing. Today was her birthday! She loved birthdays. What surprises would today bring?

Ranger Tabatha peeked through her tree house window. What a perfect day for a birthday! Insects darted through the tops of trees; leaves glistened like gold in bright sunshine, and a river gurgled far below near the town of Tabatinga. Ranger Tabatha loved her rainforest home in the Amazon Jungle. She couldn't think of a nicer place to live.

**Tap Tap Tap.** Someone was outside her bedroom door.

'Come in!' called Ranger Tabatha.

The door sprung open. Her parents stood in the doorway. They were both dressed in their ranger uniforms, ready for a busy day in the Brazilian rainforest. But there was still time for birthday celebrations before work started.

Father's arms bulged with colourful packages. Mother balanced a plate of cupcakes, a bunch of balloons and a handful of letters covered with stamps.

'Happy Birthday, Tabatha!' they cried. 'A special day for our special daughter!'

Ranger Tabatha beamed with joy.

They all sat on her bed. Mother tied the balloons to the bed head. Father placed the packages in front of Ranger Tabatha. They were lumpy, bumpy, and of various sizes. She ripped open the parcels. Inside she found a sturdy backpack, two walkie-talkies, a compass and a smart pair of binoculars. Everything a rainforest ranger needed!

Ranger Tabatha munched on a chocolate cupcake, while Mother passed over the letters covered with stamps. There were birthday cards from friends, aunties, uncles and cousins. The last envelope was the fattest of all. What was inside?

She examined the envelope. The stamps depicted pictures of kangaroos and koalas. The letter was from Australia! She turned it over. It read, 'From Granny.'

Ranger Tabatha tore the envelope open. A birthday card fell out. She read it aloud:



*Dear Tabatha,*

*Happy Birthday!*

*Enjoying my travels around the world. Down under at the moment. Marvellous land!*

*Would you believe I've found a place called Tabatinga in Australia? They could do with the help of young rainforest ranger like you.*

*Why not pop on over? The animals and plants in Australian rainforests are amazing!*

*Love & Hugs,*

*Granny x*

*PS. Next stop...New Zealand...then back to Brazil!*

Ranger Tabatha's eyes shone and her hands trembled as she stopped reading. She pulled out the remaining contents of the envelope. There was a folded map which she spread out across her bed. Australia was a big place!

Granny had also sent photos of the Australian rainforest. The animals and plants did look amazing!

Excitement filled Ranger Tabatha's chest, she could barely breathe. The Amazon Jungle was home, but perhaps the Australian rainforest could also become home.

'Can I go to Australia?' she asked. Father and Mother looked at each other. Then they looked at their daughter.

'We'll have to think about it,' said Father. 'We'll let you know by the end of the day.'

Ranger Tabatha went about her duties in the Amazon Jungle. She helped a lost baby monkey find its mother; she bandaged an anteater's injured paw; and she helped a parrot locate twigs for a new nest. All day Ranger Tabatha felt like she would burst. Would her parents say she could go to Australia...or not?

At the end of the busy day, Ranger Tabatha sat at the dining room table with her parents. They ate hamburgers, chips, and birthday cake with ice-cream.

She swallowed the last morsel of cake. Her parents glanced at one other and smiled.

'We've made a decision,' said Father. Ranger Tabatha held her breath. 'We've thought about it carefully,' said Mother.



Ranger Tabatha continued to hold her breath.

'We've decided...,' said Father, '...to let you go to Australia! You'll be a big help in the Australian rainforest.'

Ranger Tabatha bounced off her chair and danced around the room. She was going to Australia!

'When can I go?' asked Ranger Tabatha. Father slipped another parcel into her hand. It was small, rectangular and flat.

Ranger Tabatha tore away the wrapping paper. Inside was a ticket to Australia. She was leaving next week!

The week passed by quickly. Her backpack was packed ready for her trip. Ranger Tabatha and her parents arrived at a bustling airport. Mother and Father hugged her goodbye, with tears in their eyes. Tabatha's eyes also welled up. She would miss her parents!

'Granny's no longer in Australia,' said Father. 'She's travelled on to new Zealand. But she asked some rainforest friends to meet you at the airport.'

Ranger Tabatha nodded. 'I'll call you when I get there,' she said.

The aeroplane journey took many hours. Ranger Tabatha slept, ate, slept, watched a movie and slept some more. When would she arrive?

Finally, the plane began its descent onto Australian soil. She had arrived down under!

Ranger Tabatha gathered her luggage and looked around the airport. Who would be meeting her today?

She spied a group of odd looking animals. They waved at her, trying to get her attention. They also held up a sign which read, 'Ranger Tabatha.'

That was her name! They must be her new rainforest friends. 'I'm Blink,' said a frog.

'My name's Toco,' said a Toucan.

'I'm Bronte.' A pretty butterfly flitted through the air.

'My name's Snapper.' A large crocodile grinned and shook Ranger Tabatha's hand and said, 'We're so glad you are here!'

Ranger Tabatha grinned. 'So am I.' She felt warm and happy inside. She knew that Blink, Toco, Bronte and Snapper were going to be great friends. What kind of adventures would they have together?