



The Hairy-Nosed Intruder

Ranger Tabatha put her head on her pillow and closed sleepy eyes. Her bed was warm and cosy. What a busy day it had been! Ranger Tabatha had rescued a frightened baby possum from the top of a lofty gum tree; then she'd helped a cockatoo family move to a new tree; and then she'd helped cook up a feast for a red kangaroo's birthday! Ranger Tabatha felt glad to be in bed!

Tap, tap, tap. Somebody was knocking on her tree house door.

Tap, tap, tap. Who could it be at this late hour?

Ranger Tabatha opened her door and peeped outside. A grey rabbit twitched his nose and wiggled his whiskers. He looked worried. Ranger Tabatha recognised Billy Rabbit.

'Hello, Billy,' she said. 'Is something wrong?'

'Sorry to disturb you,' said Billy. 'Something dreadful has happened ! There's an intruder in my burrow and he will not leave. My family can't get to bed!'

Ranger Tabatha gasped. 'An intruder! That's terrible. I'll call the other Rangers on their walkie-talkies. We'll be there soon to help.'

'Thank you, Ranger Tabatha!' said Billy. 'I'd best get back to the wife and my ten kids. They're staying with the neighbours until the intruder leaves.' Billy climbed down the tree house ladder and bounced into the darkness.

Ranger Tabatha called each of the rangers, and made her way to Billy Rabbit's burrow.

Toco the toucan, Bronte the Butterfly, Snapper the crocodile and Blink the frog soon joined her. They stood around the burrow hole, deep in thought.

'We need to be carfeul,' said Ranger Tabatha. 'The intruder might be dangerous.'

'Oh, dear!' said Bronte. She flitted nervously through the air.

'Listen,' said Snapper. 'Can you hear that?' Everyone turned an ear towards the rabbit burrow.

'I'm all alone,' said a gloomy voice. 'Nobody likes me. No friends to speak of.' The gloomy voice sniffed a sorrowful sniff. 'I'm all alone,' it said again.

'I don't think the intruder is dangerous,' said Snapper. 'Neither do I!' said Blink. 'The intruder sounds sad,' said Toco.

'Let's find out what's wrong,' said Ranger Tabatha. She dropped to her hands and knees and crawled to the edge of the rabbit burrow. 'Cooeee!' she called into the



dark hole. 'Who's down there? Can I help you?'

A loud sniff echoed through the burrow tunnels. 'What else could go wrong?' said the gloomy voice. 'Now, I'm hearing voices! If I had any friends, they'd tell me I was crazy!'

'You're not hearing voices,' called Ranger Tabatha. 'I'm a real person.'

'Oh, dear!' said the gloomy intruder. 'I truly must have a screw loose! The voices sound so real.'

Ranger Tabatha shook her head in exasperation, and looked up at the others. 'I'll have to go inside the burrow. The intruder won't believe me until he sees me!'

Ranger Tabatha instructed Toco and Blink to stand guard around the burrow. Snapper and Bronte followed Ranger Tabatha into the hole. They crawled on hands and knees through black tunnels which twisted one way, then turned another.

The sniffs of the intruder grew louder and louder. Finally, they emerged into a snug little room. Lamp light cast a golden glow over the walls. Ten little beds, one for each rabbit baby, stood in a neat row. Carrots overflowed from a barrel in one corner of the room. In the opposite corner sat a fat and forlorn figure. It was the intruder. His hairy back faced them. He didn't notice the arrival of Ranger Tabatha, Snapper and Bronte.

'Nobody likes me,' he said with a sigh. 'No friends to speak of. I'm all alone.'

'You're not alone any more,' said Ranger Tabatha kindly. 'We'll be your friends.'

'Oh, that's nice,' said the hairy creature. 'The voices might not be real, but at least they're friendly.'

Snapper tiptoed toward the intruder and placed a gentle hand on his back.

The creature jolted in surprise. 'Why!' he exclaimed. 'Someone touched me. At least I think they did!' He turned his head around and stared at them. He had a hairy-nose. 'Are you real, or an hallucination?' he asked. 'I've been hearing voices, you know.'

'We're perfectly real,' said Snapper.

'We heard you crying,' said Ranger Tabatha. 'We want to help. What's your name?'

'Oh, I see,' said the intruder. 'My name's Winston. Not that anybody really cares. You see, I don't have any friends.'

'Why don't you have any friends?' asked Bronte.

'I'm all alone,' said Winston. 'I'm a northern hairy-nosed wombat, and I think I'm the last one left in the whole world. I can't find any of my family members.' Winston sniffed. 'I've searched every burrow in the rainforest, but it's no use. I've found



rabbits, numbats, bilbies, but not no hairy-noses.'

Ranger Tabatha, Snapper and Bronte stood deep in thought. Winston sighed and sniffed gloomily.

Ranger Tabatha began to grin. 'I think I have some good news for you, Winston,' she said. 'We need to let the Rabbit family come home, so why don't you come outside with us. Then if you can wait a while, I'll bring a surprise to you.'

Winston shrugged his shoulders and said, 'Okay, then.' He still looked sad. They all crawled on hands and knees through the black tunnels which twisted one way, then turned another. One by one, they popped up through the hole.

Ranger Tabatha dashed off into the heart of the rainforest. The rabbits returned home and went to bed. Everyone else chatted and laughed together, except for Winston who sat silently, staring at nothing in particular.

A little while later, footsteps were heard. Ranger Tabatha burst forward and announced, 'Winston, there's someone I'd like you to meet.'

A plump animal peeped shyly around Ranger Tabatha's legs. The creature had a hairy nose!

'You're no longer alone, Winston,' said Ranger Tabatha. 'This is Wilma.'

Winston looked up and gasped. He couldn't stop staring. He picked up a carrot (which he'd taken as a snack from the rabbit burrow) and gave it to Wilma.

'Nice to meet you,' he said. Then he smiled and smiled and smiled some more.