



The Rainforest Ghost

A cool morning breeze whispered through the rainforest trees. Animals bustled about even though it was still very early. Nobody stayed late in bed on Rainforest Day, a special day to celebrate their wonderful rainforest home. There would be ceremony to welcome new rainforest folk, and afterwards a barbecue banquet for lunch. In the afternoon, youngsters would play games while their parents snoozed and snored.

There was much to be done before the celebrations began. The Rainforest Choir was preparing a song for the ceremony.

Ranger Tabatha stood with hands on hips. She grasped a conductor's baton in one hand. A choir of animals stood in ordered rows before her. 'From the top of the song,' she said tapping the baton against a tree stump. 'We must practise until our singing is perfect. It's not long until the celebrations begin.' Ranger Tabatha glanced towards a branch above the crowd. 'And galahs, try to sing more softly this time. Your voices drown everyone else out!'

Blink the frog stood in the middle of the choir. Blink had once sung in a school choir, but never before in one quite like this. Everyone was there: Snapper the crocodile, Toco the toucan and Bronte the butterfly. A red kangaroo poised upright on Blink's right side, a goanna on the left. Birds of every colour filled the branches of surrounding trees.

Ranger Tabatha tapped the tree stump again. 'Now, from the top...'

Each mouth opened, each chest expanded with a deep breath, but before anyone could utter a single note, the sound of sobbing filled the air.

'Someone's crying!' Voices within the choir whispered to one another. 'I wonder what's the matter?'

Ranger Tabatha looked towards Blink. Her expression seemed to say, *We'd better go and investigate*. She also glanced towards Snapper, Toco and Bronte.

'Listen up, everyone,' said Ranger Tabatha. 'Look's like something's come up. You'll have to practise without me for a while.' Each choir member nodded with understanding. 'We'll be note perfect by the time you come back,' called one of the galahs.

'The crying was coming from this direction,' said Ranger Tabatha leading the way. Blink, Snapper, Toco and Bronte followed closely behind.

The sobs grew louder and louder and louder. 'Can you see who's crying?' said Blink. Toco flew above to get a bird's eye view. 'Nope, can't see anyone!'

Bronte fluttered through leaves and bushes. 'I can hear them, but I can't see them!'

Snapper jumped up and down in a large puddle. 'There's no-one here!'



The voice continued to wail.

Blink looked around and whimpered. 'Do you think it's a g...g...ghost?'

'A g...g...ghost!' cried Toco. 'It m...m...must be!'

They all began to whimper, except for Ranger Tabatha who declared, 'Don't be such silly billies!'

'What else c...c...can it be?' said Toco.

Ranger Tabatha didn't answer. Instead, she crept over to a pile of dry leaves. 'Are you in there, Luigi?' The leaves rustled as something within them began to move.

'GHOST!' shrieked Blink, Snapper, Toco and Bronte. 'Not a ghost,' said Ranger Tabatha. 'It's Luigi!'

She reached inside the pile of leaves, then slowly and carefully withdrew her hand. She held it out for the others to see. 'Meet the newest rainforest resident. This is Luigi.'

All eyes turned to stare at a quivering creature on Ranger Tabatha's hand. It was a tiny grey mouse. Teardrops dripped from its whiskers. Blink wondered how such a tiny animal could cry so loudly.

'What's the matter, Luigi?' asked Ranger Tabatha. Luigi glanced at the others with frightened eyes, then scampered onto Ranger Tabatha's shoulders. He stood on tip-toes to squeak into her ear.

He then pulled a scrap of paper from underneath his hat. Ranger Tabatha frowned with concern as she read the note.

"Can I show the others?" she asked Luigi. The mouse nodded.

They all read the note. It said:

'GO AWAY! You aren't my friend.'

'Oh dear!' said Blink. Snapper, Toco and Bronte shook their heads in disbelief.

'Luigi doesn't know who sent it,' said Ranger Tabatha. 'He says it drifted down from the sky this morning. He feels like he doesn't belong here.' Ranger Tabatha paused. 'Luigi thinks someone is telling him to leave the rainforest.'

'That's terrible!' said Toco. 'Very mean!' said Bronte.

Blink hopped up and down. 'I want Luigi to stay!'

'He does belong here!' said Snapper.



Before Luigi could respond, the tree leaves above them rustled as something within them began to move. 'GHOST!' shrieked Snapper, Toco, Bronte and Blink.

'Not a ghost,' said a raspy voice. A green head popped through the leaves. 'It's me, Cicely Lizard. Excuse me for interrupting, but I've come to apologise.'

'What for?' said Ranger Tabatha. 'I left my children home alone while I delivered sausages for today's barbecue banquet.' Cicely scuttled down the tree trunk. 'While I was out, my little ones, Lizzy and Lenny, had a squabble. Lizzy got upset and refused to talk to Lenny. He kept teasing her and because she wasn't talking to him, she wrote a note which said, "GO AWAY! You aren't my friend.'

Cicely lifted her green head and looked at Luigi. 'I believe the note fell from the tree and into the wrong hands. For that I'm very sorry.' Luigi puffed out his chest, wiped the teardrops from his whiskers and grinned. 'Apology accepted,' he squeaked.

'I'd also like to invite you, Mr Luigi Mouse, to be my guest at the Rainforest Day Ceremony. It's important that you are officially welcomed as a rainforest citizen. This is where you now belong.' Luigi's smile became so wide it almost reached from ear to ear.

They all walked back together, and arrived just in time for the Rainforest Day ceremony. Ranger Tabatha took her place as choir conductor, and Blink, Toco and Bronte stood within the choir ranks. They all sang well, except for the galahs who still sang with raucous voices.

Luigi Mouse grinned throughout the whole ceremony, especially when a certificate was handed to him. It read:

'Luigi Mouse. Citizen of the Rainforest.'

Everyone ate too many sausages at the barbecue. This made the adults sleepy, so while their children played, they snored throughout the afternoon.

Luigi Mouse sighed with contentment, and fell asleep in the warm afternoon sun.