



## The River Monster

Moonlight shimmered on the surface of the river. Ranger Tabatha, Toco the Toucan, Snapper the Crocodile, Blink the Frog and Bronte the Butterfly travelled in single file along the riverbank. They were on an adventure to find Murray the Platypus. Dawn was the best time to find Murray. He liked to swim in the early hours of the day, before the night disappeared and before the sun woke up.

'I can't wait to see him again,' said Blink. 'I knew Murray when I was a young tadpole. Murray cared for me while my parents hunted for bugs to eat.' Blink smiled, with a faraway look in his eyes, as he remembered.

Blink held a squiggle covered leaf in his hand. It read:

*Dear Blink,*

*Come and visit me soon.*

*Your old friend, Murry.*

*PS: Bring your friends along if you like.*

'I know Murray is looking forward to meeting my friends,' said Blink.

'We can't wait to meet him!' said Ranger Tabatha. The others murmured in agreement.

They continued to journey in silence, enjoying the cool air as it tingled their skin. Sticks crunched underneath their feet and owls hooted in the distance.

Snapper halted as they came to a river bend. Snapper sniffed the air. 'What's that smell!'

They all stopped to sniff. Ranger Tabatha wrinkled her nose, 'Whatever it is, it sure is stinky!' she said.

'Rotten!' said Toco.

'Icky!' said Bronte.

'Repulsive!' said Blink.

'Let's investigate,' said Ranger Tabatha.

They marched around the river bend. Ranger Tabatha clapped a hand to her mouth. Butterfly flitted about in fright. Everyone's eyes widened in surprise.

Night time still surrounded them, but they could clearly see a gigantic mound in the middle of the river. In the dusky moonlight it looked like a lumpy black hill. As they



drew nearer, the stench grew stronger. The river water struggled to get past the hill. It pushed hard, but only a trickle managed to get past.

'It's a river monster!' cried Bronte. 'A smelly monster!' said Snapper. 'An enormous monster!' said Toco.

'I don't think it is a monster,' said Ranger Tabatha. 'At least, it's not the kind of monster you're thinking of. I think I know what it is. We need to find Murray right away!'

'His burrow isn't far away,' said Blink. 'I'll lead the way.'

They trekked single file again, with Blink as the leader. Every so often he called, 'Murray! Murray! It's Blink. I've come to visit!'

A soft voice floated on a breeze. 'I'm here, Blink,' it sighed. The voice drifted away, then returned: 'Come quickly, Blink.'

They quickened their pace until they rounded another river bend. 'This is Murray's home,' said Blink as he knelt down and peered into a dark burrow on the riverbank. 'We're here Murray!'

The sound of muffled grunts and snuffles came from the hole. One webbed foot appeared, then another, followed by a smooth bill and two peeping eyes. The bill drooped low and the eyes looked dull.

'Murray, what's wrong?' cried Blink. The platypus laid his weary head against the burrow edge. 'I feel sick,' murmured Murray. 'I don't know what's wrong.'

'I know what's wrong,' said Bronte.

'So do I,' said Ranger Tabatha with a grim expression. 'Morning light should soon arrive. When it does, we need to do something about that river monster.'

'Let's make Murray a comfortable bed,' said Blink. They all nodded and began to scour the river bank for suitable bed materials. They gathered grass, moss and leaves and piled them into a soft nest. Blink took a blanket from his back pack and tucked Murray into his new bed.

Ranger Tabatha took a bottle of water from her backpack. 'You should drink some clean water,' she said to Murray. 'The river water is dirty because of the river monster.'

Blink held Murray's flipper as Ranger Tabatha put the bottle to his bill. Murray took a sip 'Clean water does taste good,' he said.

They sat quietly with the sick platypus until the horizon blushed pink and they were surrounded by sunlight.

'Blink, you stay and take care of Murray,' said Ranger Tabatha. 'And Toco, you fly



away and gather helping hands. The rest of us will investigate the river monster.'

Blink wiped Murray's brow with a cool cloth, while Toco flew into the trees and the others disappeared around the river bend.

Ranger Tabatha led the way back the black mound.

Bronte said, 'I thought so,' when they saw the true identity of the river monster. Rubbish oozed from the black hill: broken bottles, jagged tin cans and plastic containers sat jumbled between rotting food and unidentifiable gooey lumps.

Bronte wondered who would dump rubbish in the river! What was wrong with them?

The stench was worse in warm sunshine, but it was time to deal with the river monster. Other river folk began to appear: possums and bats from nearby trees, wallabies, pelicans, swans, snakes, lizards and many more. Word came with them about the spreading sickness. Murray wasn't the only sick creature in the area. Some of the fish and yabbies who often swam in this area were also very ill.

Everyone got to work and sorted the garbage into sacks. Toco and other strong birds grasped the bags with their strong talons and flew the rubbish away. They took some rubbish to be recycled, some to be burnt, and some to be composted.

With the help of so many paws, claws, flippers and hands, it didn't take long to clear the riverbed. Where the river monster had once rested, fresh water now gushed and gurgled.

'That's better,' said Ranger Tabatha. 'That's how a river should be.'

Ranger Tabatha, Toco, Snapper and Bronte traipsed back to Murray's burrow. Murray lifted his head and opened his bill with a big smile. 'I'm feeling better,' he said. Blink also grinned.

They gathered around the platypus and chattered together. Blink's old friend became their new friend. Murray showed them Blink's tadpole photos. Everyone *ooh-ed* and *ahh-ed* when they saw cute baby Blink! At lunchtime, Murray brought out platefuls of shrimp, crab and mayfly larvae for them to munch.

Later in the day, when the sky was lilac and crimson from the setting sun, Blink asked, 'Who do you think dumped that rubbish?'

Murray shook his head. 'I don't know, but whoever did it was selfish.'

'We might never know,' said Ranger Tabatha. 'But if we work together, we'll destroy any river monster that appears!'

Murray pulled out another old photo album. Pictures of Blink as a tiny froglet learning to hop (and falling off a log) made them laugh. They sipped cups of frothy hot chocolate, and laughed until stars twinkled in the sky above.