

The Most Beautiful Bower

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In the land of Australia, where koalas climb high in eucalyptus trees and kangaroos bound across grassy plains on great big feet, a baby bird pecked his way out of his shell.

His mother called him Kejaro, and she brought him good fruit to eat. Every day, for dessert, she brought him bugs. His feathers were brown and green, just like his mother's. Both Kejaro and his mother had pale blue eyes.

Every day, Kejaro ate fruit and bugs, to help him grow bigger. Every day, he flapped his wings hard, to help him grow stronger.

And every night, his mother told him stories about his father. "He was handsome, with satiny blue feathers," she told him. "He was graceful, with a beautiful dance. He was charming, with a lovely voice. And he built the most beautiful bower in the world."

"What's a bower?" asked Kejaro, for all he knew of the world was their nest, high in a tree and surrounded by green leaves, and the slivers of blue far above them that his mother said was "sky."

"A bower is a special nest, built upon the ground," his mother told him. "With his feet, your father smoothed the ground to make a dancing floor. With his beak, he placed each twig, just so, to make an archway. He chewed leaves and berries to make paint then dipped a piece of bark into it and painted the archway's walls. He flew far and wide to find the prettiest flowers and feathers and shells to decorate the bower with, and all of them were of the most beautiful blue."

"Like the sky?" Kejaro asked.

"Like the sky," his mother agreed. "When I came to the bower, your father danced and sang for me, and then I joined him on the dancing floor. Someday, Kejaro, you will build a bower for your lady love."

Then his mother covered him with her wing, for it was time to sleep. Kejaro closed his eyes, wondering what kind of bower he would build when he was grown.

When Kejaro was three weeks old, he flew for the very first time. Soon, he could swoop and soar and zoom up and zoom down. He went high enough to see the sky, and it was huge, not just little slivers. It stretched from one end of the world to the other, and all of it was of the most beautiful blue.

A few days later, he and his mother left their nest. They flew until they found a flock of other birds. All of them had brown and green feathers and pale blue eyes.

Kejaro spent his days playing with his new friends. They flew high in the sky, zipping and zooming and swooping and soaring. They ate fruit from trees and bushes. Sometimes, for dessert, they would hunt bugs. At night, they slept on the branches of

trees. Around them, koalas climbed high in the eucalyptus trees and kangaroos bounded across the grassy plains on great big feet.

When Kejaro was five years old, he noticed that he had some new feathers that were a dark, satiny blue. The other boys had some new dark feathers, too. All the girls were still green and brown. Kejaro decided he didn't want to spend his days zipping and zooming and swooping and soaring.

He wanted to build.

Kejaro flew into the forest, searching for just the right spot. He found it, surrounded by four tall trees, with a little rivulet of water not far away. With his feet, he smoothed the ground to make a dancing floor. With his beak, he placed each twig, just so, to make an archway. He chewed leaves and berries to make paint then used a piece of bark to paint the archway's walls. He flew far and wide to find the prettiest flowers and feathers and shells to decorate his bower with, and all of them were of the most beautiful blue.

Every day, he noticed that more of his own feathers were turning satiny blue. Every day, he practiced dancing and singing, making the sounds of other creatures he heard. Every day, he smoothed the dancing floor and rearranged the flowers and feathers and shells.

Some days he went hunting for more decorations. Kejaro found snail shells and bright leaves and beetle wings, but he liked blue parrot feathers the best. He took a few from another bird's bower a few flights away. The next day when he came back from a trip, every single one of his blue parrot feathers were gone. So Kejaro went searching again.

In the spring, a lovely green and brown bird with pale blue eyes came to his bower. He danced and sang his best for her, but then she flew away.

Kejaro was sad, but he promised himself, "I'll do it better next time." All that next year he built and rebuilt his bower, painting the archway, smoothing the dancing floor, finding and arranging his decorations of the most beautiful blue. Almost half of his own feathers were satiny blue now, and he practiced his singing and his dancing, too.

That spring, three birds came to his bower, and he sang and danced for each of them. Two of them left when he was finished, and one of them stayed for a little while, but none of them joined him on the dancing floor.

Once again, Kejaro was sad, but once again he promised himself: "I'll do it better next time." All that year he worked hard, trying to build the most beautiful bower in the world. When spring came again, all of his own feathers were dark satiny blue. He gleamed in the sunshine, and his eyes were as blue as the sky.

One morning, a lovely green and brown bird with pale blue eyes came to his bower. She watched as he danced and sang his best for her. Kejaro finished his song and

waited, hoping she thought he was handsome and graceful and charming, hoping she would stay.

She hopped over to him and said, "My name is Camira."

"My name is Kejaro," he told her, wondering if she would be his lady love.

Camira fluttered her wings a little and said, "You have built the most beautiful bower in the world."

And Kejaro was happy, for that meant he had finally done it right this time.

Then he was happier still, for Camira joined him on the dancing floor, and the two of them danced together inside the most beautiful bower in the world.