

The Brave Little Parrot

retold by JB

This is an ancient Jakata tale from India

Long ago in India there once lived a little parrot. Many of the forests in India are similar to the Australian bush especially the tropical bushland such as that in North Queensland and this forest was a very beautiful forest, green and lush with tropical flowers of red, yellow and orange and many other colours.

One day, just as sometimes happens in the Australian bush a fire broke out. Thunder crashed, lightning flashed, and sparks flew into the air and a dead tree burst into flames. Sparks, carried on the rising wind, leapt from branch to branch and tree to tree.

The little parrot smelled the smoke. She squawked in alarm to warn the animals and birds. The little parrot flew towards the river where she would be safe. The other birds recognised her call of danger and they too smelled the smoke and flew to the river.

But the little parrot, high up in the sky could see that many animals were already surrounded by the flames and could not escape. She felt very sad for them and it broke her heart to think the animals would burn to death. But what could she do to help them? She was just a little parrot.

Then she suddenly had an idea. Darting to the river, she dipped herself in the water. Then she flew back over to where the fire was raging. Thick smoke filled the air. Red and orange flames coloured the smoke and walls of flames raced through the forest.

The little parrot flew on until she reached the heart of the burning forest. There she shook her wings. The few tiny drops of water that still clung to her feathers tumbled down into the flames and vanished with a hiss.

Then the little parrot flew back through the flames and smoke to the river. Once more she dipped herself in the cool water and flew back over the burning forest. Once more she shook her wings, and a few drops of water tumbled into the flames. Hissssss.

Back and forth she flew, time and again from the river to the forest, from the forest to the river. Her feathers became charred. Her feet and claws were scorched. Her lungs ached. Her eyes burned. But she thought about the trapped animals and she continued flying back and forth from the river with droplets of water.

All the other birds had flown to safety by the river but high up in the sky flew an eagle. The eagle looked down and saw the little parrot flying among the flames. The eagle thought the little parrot was very foolish. The very thought of trying to put out a raging forest fire with tiny droplets of water was absurd.

The eagle flew down, and in the language of the birds, told the little parrot to stop being so silly and to save herself.

But the little parrot continued to fly on through the smoke and flames. She could hear the great eagle flying above her as the flames grew hotter. The eagle continued to call out but the little parrot continued to do what she could to try to put the fire out.

As the eagle watched and saw how determined the little parrot was he was touched by her bravery. She knew she could not put the fire out and yet she continued because that was all she could do to try to save the animals from the fire. Inspired by her example the eagle suddenly swooped down to the river and dipped his majestic body into the water just as the little parrot had done and then the eagle flew over to the fire and shook his magnificent feathers so that great droplets of water fell down on the flames. All the while the eagle called out to the other eagles, calling for their help.

One by one the other eagles answered the call. They came and dipped their feathers in the river and flew over to the flames and shook the water down onto the flames. Soon the sky was dark with flying eagles that flew back and forth from the river to the flames. When the other birds, that were already safe by the river, saw what the eagles were doing they too dipped their bodies into the water and flew over the fire and shook their wings so that droplets of water fell down on the flames. Very soon there were so many birds in the sky shaking their wet feathers that it was as though the rain was pouring down on the fire which sizzled and shrank and finally died.

The little parrot, which was by now covered in smoked and charred feathers, cried with exhaustion and relief. And they say that the tears of the little parrot fell on the ground and it wasn't long before new life sprang from the earth. New shoots sprang up among the blackened trees.

And they say the little parrot's feathers grew back and were more beautiful and more colourful than ever before.

Whether this story is true or not I do not know but I know that birds do have language and in the old days many of the Australian Aboriginal people used to know the language of the birds so it is possible that the birds might have communicated with each other in order to save the animals.