

Rainbows Over Booroong'pah

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There was a time when he was once part of a great radiant arc. A spectrum of colour that shimmered with limitless wonder, touching both peaks and valleys. A bridge between Earth and the heavens. In his full glory, he was hope—the promise that light always returned after a storm.

But now, he shifted uneasily from foot to foot. Feathers flattened tightly against his body. His little red eye gleaming as he focused on every crag, every boulder beyond the holes of a cardboard box.

A kaleidoscope of colour dimmed by the weight of his own uncertainty.

Would they... remember him?

The gentle rustle of gum leaves mingled with the familiar song of the green frog, a melody that cradled his aching heart, reminding him of home. Booroong'pah. A land older than the wind, where a jagged mountain stood, its silhouette carved by forces that transcended the fleeting lives of rainbow and man.

A chorus of screeches and squawks echoed across the sky, pulling a desperate chirp from his beak.

He'd been lost to the Grey.

It had all started when his wings locked up and his toes cramped.

For days, the rainbow fought a silent battle within himself. While the others fed on nectar and danced joyously among the wattle, he hobbled from branch to branch until even perching became a struggle. He tumbled to the ground, a flash of colour against dirt. His fellow rainbows called out to taste the sweetness of the bottlebrush, but the more he tried, the more exhausted he became, forced to survive on bitter discarded blossoms.

Then, the worst happened. No matter how hard he tried, the rainbow could not eat or respond to the others, and despair crept into his hollow bones.

Just when he feared that he would fade entirely, a pair of bushwalkers spotted his plumage through the undergrowth. Heart thumping, every instinct compelled him to bite, to screech, to fly! But he could not.

Swaddled in cloth, they whisked him away, to a far-off place where syringes delivered life-sustaining liquid, drop by drop, down his gullet. Weeks of treatment ensued, and he slowly regained control of his movements. These humans, with their warm hands and soft-spoken words, were a mystery to him.

“Lorikeet paralysis syndrome,” one human told another, “we’ve taken in over three thousand birds this year.”

They claimed that he was one of the lucky ones, that many of the other rainbows had faded into the Grey. But what is luck to a creature that knows only the sky and the trees, that longs not for safety but for the freedom of the open air? Each time he was gently lifted by the humans, he would close his eyes and imagine soaring endlessly over his homeland.

There were moments when he felt like a fledgling again, relearning to hop from branches or climb the wire. In neighbouring cages, hundreds of recovering rainbows from the Gold Coast to Toowoomba cheered him on.

Now though, in the shadows of a cardboard box, his wings twitched with newfound strength.

As the carrier opened, a breeze swept through the eucalyptus trees, carrying the syrupy scent of lilly pilly in bloom. With a flutter, the rainbow emerged and flew to a nearby thorn tree. Booroong’pah stood before him, against the pale blue horizon.

Home—his return to self and sky.

His wings, brushstrokes of crimson, cobalt, emerald, and gold, beat steadily as he launched into the sky, climbing higher and higher until he touched the clouds. Below, the mosaic of verdant valleys and rolling hills was punctuated by the sprays of pink grevillea.

Along the crest of folded rock, a band of rainbows paraded. He called out a clear, ringing note, and the flock answered, their voices merging in a harmony that vibrated through him. The rainbow rejoined them, his worries dissolving like raindrops in the sunlight. When they enveloped him, their collective joy became an explosion of light and sound. As they flew together, they wove through the sky in perfect unison, forming a bend—a living rainbow that stretched up and over Booroong’pah.

A merging of soul and sky.

Of earth and spirit.

No matter how far he strayed, he would always find his way back to the place where rainbows begin.