

Saving Swifty

Evelyn Davidson

Swifty nervously poked her head into a hollow nestled in the trunk of an old gum tree, her heart fluttering with hope. Maybe this could be her new home.

“Looks like Mrs Glider already lives here,” she squawked.

Swifty had searched tirelessly, flying from tree to tree, day after day. She remembered from when she was a chick, tales of a land filled with trees as far as you could see, plenty of food and hollows shared with gliders and swift parrots alike. “Just like me,” Swifty thought.

Suddenly, the ROAR of a chainsaw echoed through the bush.

BANG!

Another tree fell, sending tremors through the earth. Swifty’s heart sank. The crashing of falling trees was all Swifty had known. Trees were being cut down faster than ever before.

“I’m never going to find a home to make a family of my own,” she thought.

“SQUAAAARK!”

Swifty turned towards the sound. Another swift parrot was flying toward her.

“Hi, I’m Dash. I’ve seen you flying around. Any luck finding a hollow?”

Swifty shook her head sadly.

Dash landed beside her, “Would you...” he hesitated before asking shyly, “Would you like to share mine? They’re getting hard to find aren’t they!?”

As the sun sank below the horizon, Swifty and Dash huddled together in their hollow. They worried about the future with fewer and fewer hollows around. But right now, they felt safe. Together.

Swifty shivered. She knew The Cold was coming and remembered her mother’s story about migration.

“You’ll know it’s time when the days become cool and dry, and the nights crisp,” her mother had said. “When the leaves slowly turn red, gold, and orange. That’s when you’ll know. You must fly across the water to the Big Land where it’s warmer and there’s plenty of nectar and lerps. Then, when you’re ready to start a family of your own, that’s when you’ll come home.”

“I’m scared,” Swifty whispered into the growing darkness, “I’ve never migrated before. What if I’m not strong enough to cross the water to the Big Land?”

“Me neither,” murmured Dash, already falling asleep. “We’ll figure it out. At least we’ll be together.”

“Can we stay another night?”

Dash nodded, pressing his dark blue crown against hers. “I’d love that.”

Swifty snuggled closer.

“Tomorrow...” Dash whispered.

Swifty woke the next morning to the flurry of wings and squawks. Panic surged through her as she realised her flock were already on the move.

Dash!” she squawked, waking him up. “We have to go. Everyone is leaving. We’ll be left behind!”

“It’s okay,” Dash whispered, still waking up. “We’ve got time. We’ll leave soon.”

They packed up their hollow, leaving the brief safety it had provided, and began their long flight to the Big Land.

For hours, they flew side by side, nothing but water in every direction. Swifty's wings ached, every flap getting harder and harder when, suddenly, Dash squawked excitedly, "Swifty! Look! That dark line on the horizon – that's the Big Land!"

Hope filled Swifty's tired body, renewing her energy. She flapped harder, her wings no longer feeling as heavy. She knew she could make it. As they approached land she caught sight of towering gums, their leaves glistening in the sunlight.

"Old trees have the best hollows," her mother's voice echoed in her head. "Look for the old trees."

"Beautiful," she breathed, knowing this was a sight she knew she would never forget.

As if on cue, the entire flock broke out in a chorus of squawks, sharing her excitement and hope of a home for the winter. As one, the flock flew down into the bush, eager to secure the safety of a hollow.

"It's so warm and colourful," exclaimed Swifty.

"SQUAWK!" Swifty felt Dash leave her side and turned to follow him.

"There! A hollow – and it's free!" Dash called excitedly. "Come quickly Swifty!"

Swifty swooped down beside him and peered inside the hollow. "It's perfect," she said. It was just like the home she had always dreamed of. Grateful but exhausted they settled in, nestled together.

NEEEAAAWWWW

Out of nowhere, Dash grabbed Swifty, pulling her out of the hollow. Their tree began to tilt, creaking ominously. The creak became a groan, growing louder and louder until, with a thundering CRASH, it splintered and fell to the ground. A tree that had stood strong and true, housing generations, lay broken.

For a moment, there was silence.

Not a single bird call. Not even the rustle of leaves.

It was as if all the creatures of the bush had frozen in horror.

"Our home," Swifty sobbed softly. She huddled close to Dash, devastated by the loss of the hollow that had seemed perfect, a home just for them – gone in an instant.

"I'll fly on and look for something else," said Dash, his voice breaking but determined.

He flew for hours, but when he returned just as the sun was setting, his face was grim. "The few hollows I found were already taken by ringtails, sugar-glidors or other birds."

"You've been flying for hours," Swifty said, "Rest up. I'll go look. Maybe I can find someone willing to share just for tonight."

Dash nodded wearily, but just as Swifty prepared to alight, something caught his attention – a shadow in the tree behind them. He flew over quickly – a hollow!

"It's not much," Dash said as Swifty cautiously peered inside, "but it'll do for tonight."

Gratefully, they settled in, pressing close for warmth knowing tomorrow would be another big day of flying. The cold was quickly creeping into their hollow, but what worried Swifty more was a question neither of them dared to voice: Would they ever find a hollow that was truly safe?

Little did Swifty and Dash know that across the Big Land there were people who cared.

Whole communities were fighting to save old forests and planting trees that would one day, hopefully...

have hollows.

Hollows that could be homes to save Swifty.