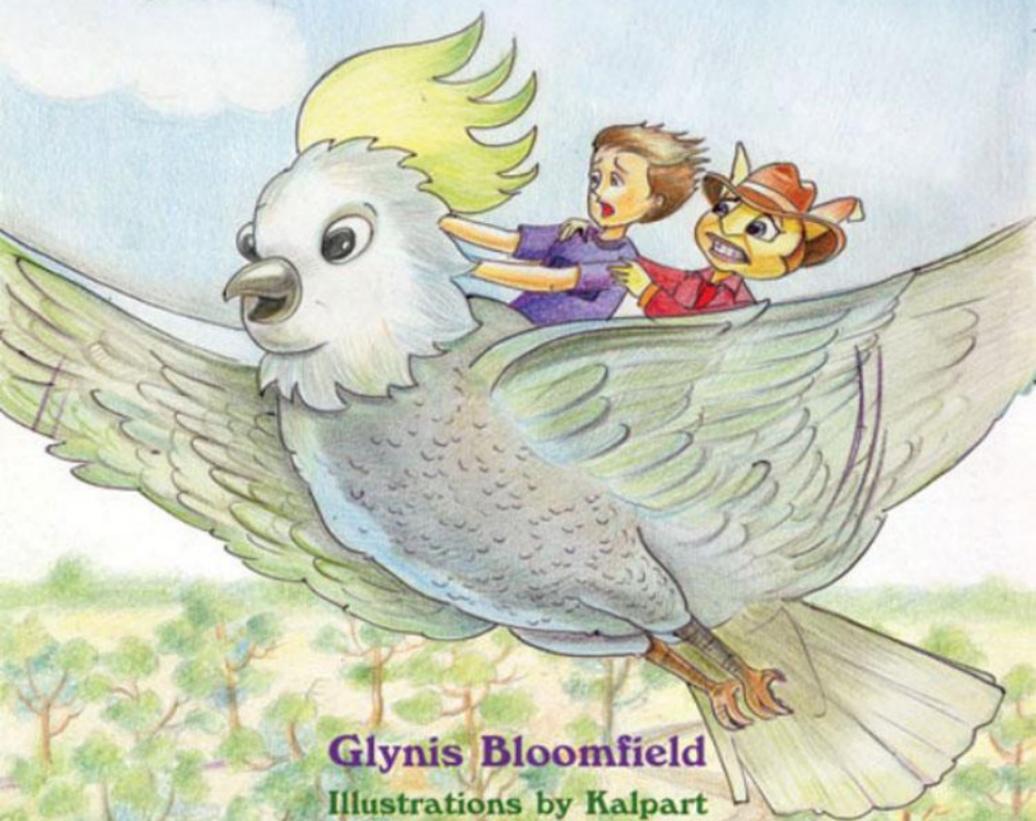


JAKE'S SECRET



Glynis Bloomfield

Illustrations by Kalpart

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by

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Strategic Book Group

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*To Teniele, Augustine, Kamilah, Myall,
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Jake opened his eyes with a jolt as he felt a tingle of excitement surge rapidly through his body. He turned his head slowly one way and then the other, his now wide eyes searching this way and that as he whispered, “Chadwick, is that you?” Was he dreaming or had he actually heard Chadwick? There was no answer to his whispered question and his body relaxed again, his head and shoulders drooping slowly back in his chair as he realised that Chadwick was nowhere to be seen. In fact, Jake hadn’t seen Chadwick for months. He looked thoughtful for a moment and then the corners of his mouth gradually curved upwards and a twinkle appeared in his eyes as it often did when he thought of Chadwick. His mate Chadwick. Chadwick, the best friend he’d ever had. Chadwick,

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the strangest looking friend anyone had ever had. He thought now of that tiny, weird-looking creature with its cheery, yellow, round face that was always grinning. A happy, round face with a pair of protruding, triangular-shaped ears, like a sunflower with big, pointy leaves poking out each side. What a sight he was.

As he lay there smiling to himself, Jake remembered again why he had to stop spending time with Chadwick. His smile quickly disappeared and he felt his stomach squirm. The problem was that nobody else could see Chadwick. No one believed him and the kids at school made fun of him. Every day they teased cruelly, "Jake's got an imaginary friend! Jake's a weirdo! Jake's a weirdo!" Jake had almost started to believe that maybe Chadwick wasn't real.

It really was best that he tried now to ignore the memories that kept flooding

his mind. Memories of exciting adventures. And laughter. Lots of laughter. Like the time Chadwick had been outside the classroom propped on the window ledge, pressing his face flat against the glass, trying to get Jake's attention. Jake had looked up from his books and automatically burst out laughing. "I think I almost choked that day trying to stop laughing. I had to pretend it was a cough and run out and get a drink of water." Jake giggled quietly to himself. The comical sight of Chadwick's face squashed up against the window was something Jake thought he would remember forever. Yes, there was lots of laughing back then. But there were also feelings of sadness. And confusion. Why could nobody else see the little creature? A tear rolled from his eye and down his cheek then, and as he wiped it away, he thought to himself, *I miss you, Chadwick.*

Jake had been lying on his "special" bed on the front verandah of his house,

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feeling lonely and bored. He had closed his eyes and was trying to imagine that he was on an exciting adventure, but whenever his mind turned to adventure, images of that unusual little creature suddenly appeared. And then he had thought he heard Chadwick's voice. He must have been dreaming.

To fill in time this morning, Jake began to watch a trail of ants carrying the tiny crumbs that he had dropped from his toast. He even deliberately dropped crumbs of different sizes to see just how ambitious ants were. He was fascinated that they seemed to be able to carry things that were the same size as themselves. Yesterday's breakfast of soggy cereal and warm milk had been hilarious, he had spilt more on his clothes than he had put in his mouth. It was impossible to try and feed himself while lying back, but he had refused help from his mother, saying, "Mum! I'm nine years old, I can feed myself!" Today she had

made him some toast and Vegemite. As she put it on the table beside his chair, she had teased, “No cereal for you, my dear. I’m not going to have to wash another set of clothes so early in the day again today!”

He sighed as he turned his attention back to the ants. Not very exciting, so he tried exploring the sky for shapes and images. He could see all sorts of things in the clouds. As plain as anything, he could see an elephant, a Tyrannosaurus Rex, and the word “Boring.”

“Hey, Mum,” he called. “I can even see the word *boring* in the clouds.”

“What was that, honey?” his mother called from inside the house. He could hear dishes clinking, so he guessed she was in the kitchen.

“Oh nothing,” Jake replied, sighing gloomily again, “I’m just bored.”

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“Oh, well that’s nothing new. I’ve heard you say that when you’ve had your friends over and there have been heaps of things to do.” The clinking and the clanging continued.

Jake’s family lived in a typical Australian bungalow-style house with a verandah at the front. It wasn’t like the two-storey brick houses in the new suburbs several kilometers away. Their house was made of weatherboards, as were most of the houses in his street. His parents thought that these older, wooden houses had much more “character” than the “same, same” brick houses.

Jake’s mother had wheeled him out onto the front porch many times over the past weeks. Each time he had protested, but he was always given the same reply: “You must have fresh air and sunshine when you’re sick.” He knew there was no point arguing, no point reminding her

that he wasn't actually sick, he just had a broken leg. And he felt lonely and bored. No amount of fresh air and sunshine would make him feel any better!

He looked around, searching for anything interesting that might be happening. There was nobody in the street, not even a car passing by. Out of the blue, like lightning flashing across a stormy sky, the name Chadwick again leapt into his mind. He'd tried and tried to forget Chadwick. And sometimes it had worked, but today the memories just kept coming, flooding his mind. He closed his eyes, scrunching them tightly, trying hard to stop the memories and the images that came rushing into his head.

He tried diverting his eyes and concentrating his attention on the front yard. To his left there was a colorful little flowerbed that ran along the front fence. To the right there were a few trees and

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bushes that were all native to Australia. Jake's mother was a park ranger, so she knew all about native plants. The whole area had been in a drought for some time, so all that survived when there were water restrictions and they weren't allowed to water the garden were the natives. He glanced over at the bright garden bed of marigolds, the yellow and orange colors reminding him of his little mate. He could almost see that weird, little yellow face grinning up at him through the flowers. To take his attention away from thoughts of Chadwick, Jake called to his mother, "Mum! Are marigolds native to Australia?"

His mother poked her head through the doorway and wiped her face with her hand as she swallowed the last of her toast. "Actually they are native to Mexico, so they love the sun. I planted them because I love the colors. And they are hardy plants, so they survive on the water I recycle from

the washing machine.” She walked back inside, singing to herself.

In the middle of the front yard there was a path that led from the verandah to the front gate. Under a huge gum tree to the right of the path was Mum’s fishpond. There wasn’t much action there, he couldn’t even hear any frogs croaking. They had been lucky that they still had some rainwater in their tank, so they were able to keep the pond full and also put water in the bird bath.

Jake sighed again as he muttered to himself, “Oh, I wish I could do something exciting,” but he knew that was impossible with his leg in plaster and doctor’s orders of ‘complete bed rest’. “Of course, if Chadwick were here, there’d be excitement!” Again he shook his head sadly and pushed the thoughts away.

Just then his attention was diverted by a noise coming from the little bush at

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the end of the verandah. “Nothing exciting, just birds.” He sighed as he looked around to see what they were doing. Little finches were sashaying through the bush, chasing each other. Today he wasn’t even interested in watching the finches or the little sparrows that were splashing merrily in the birdbath. Today he was just bored and lonely. “I wish I could understand and talk to the animals. Chadwick always told me I could. I tried, but all I could hear was chirp, wolf, meow and grunt.” He glanced over towards the finches and called, “Hey, you birds, come and play with me.” The little birds seemed to stop and look his way, but they continued flitting in and out the bushes as if they were playing a game of tag. He turned his attention back to the pond and managed a grin as he remembered that someone had told him that a goldfish’s memory only lasts for three seconds. “That would be a boring conversation. I’d have to say the same thing over and over again because they would keep forgetting.”

Jake's father had hung a bird box from the old gum tree in the front yard and some days Jake would sit for hours fascinated by the birds as they pecked at the seeds he left for them. Jake had told his father that he would need to plant some special flowering trees and bushes if he wanted to attract different types of birds. Chadwick had told him that. His father had been impressed that Jake was so knowledgeable and luckily he hadn't asked where the information had come from. He called out to his mother, "I wish Dad had planted some flowering trees, at least then there might be lots of interesting birds for me to watch."

He heard his mother call a reply from the kitchen. "Yeah, well you know how busy your father is, maybe you and I can do it when you are back on your feet."

"Yeah maybe," he replied and he sighed to himself. "I need something

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more exciting today than watching birds anyway.” As he lay there feeling sorry for himself, he remembered some of the things that Chadwick had taught him about plants and animals. “No, no, no! I am not going to think of Chadwick!” But he had nothing else to keep his mind occupied and he couldn’t stop the thoughts, so for a short while he gave up trying.

He allowed himself to smile again as he remembered his “invisible friend” and their special relationship. And then, without thinking, he rolled his head back and laughed out loud as he recalled some of Chadwick’s sayings, like “Blimey” and “Blimey Teddy,” which meant “Oh my goodness.” And “Dead Horse,” which meant tomato sauce and “Joe Blake,” which meant snake. All Jake had to do was listen to the sentence carefully and work out the rhyme and he usually figured out what Chadwick was talking about. Embarrassed, Jake

looked toward the street to see if anyone had seen him laughing to himself.

“Okay, I am not going to think about Chadwick anymore. There were just too many hassles when he was around.”

“When who was around? Who are you talking to?” His mother had suddenly appeared, poking her head around the doorway as she wiped her hands on a tea towel. “Are you talking to yourself, son? You know they say that’s the first sign of madness”. She giggled and walked back inside without waiting for a reply. Jake was grateful because he didn’t want to have to explain what was going through his mind.

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