

THE LITTLE EGRET

A story for young people

By
Grandpa and Carys

Fact. Egrets are pure white birds which live beside water in warm places. They have long beaks which they use to catch their food such as fish, frogs, toads which live in these habitats. There are three types of egret, the Cattle Egret, the Great White Egret and the Little Egret. Our story is about a Little Egret, the smaller of the three.

Note. Although they are birds, we have given the characters of our story names and voices so we can tell you what happens to them.

GRANDPA

Eduardo, a pure white little egret is perched in a small tree overlooking the flat land beneath him. The sun beams down from a clear Portuguese sky. "What's to become of us?" he says out loud " the lagoon is dry. The sun has evaporated the water and baked the mud hard." Below him a black winged stilt and an avocet heard his sigh and looked up, but there was nothing to be said. It was plain for all to see. Their wetland home was no more. The shallow water they bathed in, the mud they all probed with their long beaks was now a hard cracked expanse. Eduardo flew down to join his neighbours. Their chat was intense, beaks flashed in the light as words spluttered out. "It's unheard of" exclaimed Stilt, "never has the heat of the sirocco wind blowing in from Morocco been so fierce" "Yes," replied Avocet, " no wonder our Monte Gordo lagoon has disappeared. The wind blows right over it." "For sure", added Eduardo, " our weather has become harsher because the climate itself has been changing for a long time now. The summers have got longer and hotter, the wind is too and now it's come to this." "What is to become of us?" they all said together. "We are having to fly further and further in land to find food and water. Where will it all end?"

For one of the three dispirited birds the answer to that question was to come sooner rather than later. Ironically, it was the sirocco wind itself which provided it. This year the hot wind from the Sahara desert blew harder and for longer. It filled the sky with yellow desert sand all the way from Portugal through France and into the United Kingdom.

It was a wind of such strength that the long legged birds of the Monte Gordo lagoon were totally taken by surprise. Stilt and Avocet scuttled deep into the parched rushes and lay flat so the wind blew over them. Eduardo though

was in his usual watching place high in his tree when the wind blew. Whisked skywards from his perch and hurtled northwards, he was powerless to resist. For a day and a night the wind took him higher and further until it ran out of steam, finally subsided and set him down gently but where? As he shook the yellow sand from his pure white feathers, Eduardo sensed something was not quite right. The air was much cooler, the light less bright, and water and green vegetation was all around.

“Where am I”, he said to himself, What is this place?”

A loud squawk, more like a ‘kraak’ told him he was not alone. A big bird, a much bigger, grey version of himself, flew in and landed beside him. “And what have we here?” it said.

NOW FOR CARYS

Eduardo was a bit frightened by the presence of this big bird looking down on him and blurted out a quick reply “ No problem amigo I waser....just leaving” and spread out his pure white wings ready to fly off.

“ Please don’t go. I was actually needing some help with something.”

“What sort of something would that be,” asked Eduardo curiously. Before the big bird could answer a sudden substantial gust of wind hit Eduardo and blew him right into the middle of the deep river which almost swallowed him whole. “ Keep an eye out for my brother” the big grey bird called out, “ he looks just like me but has a white mark on his right shoulder.” Before he could answer Eduardo felt the water swirl and pull him under and gush into his lungs, the current carrying him out into the river.

TO BE CONTINUED by GRANDPA

The next thing he knew was that he was back on the river bank with big grey wings wrapped around his shoulders. “Got your breath back now?” the big bird asked kindly. Before Eduardo could answer, the bird added “I’m Harold the heron by the way and it looks like you might be some kind of relative what with your long legs and bill.” Eduardo looked up. “Amigo, I mean Harold, you saved my life. Water is so wild and cold here, nothing like the calm shallow lagoons of home.”

“Well this is your home now. The fierce warm wind from the south has seen to that. You’ll need to learn fast. Still, you have made an important start with no harm done” and he chuckled as he said it.

“ Thanks again”, said Eduardo, reassured by these friendly words and laugh, “ but what was that you were saying about your brother. I would like to thank you by helping so what has happened?”

“Well cousin, life around here is not a bowl of cherries either. Wild water is the least of our worries.” He hurried on quickly. “There are men who roam the land, woods and rivers with guns shooting tame birds called pheasants. That’s bad luck for pheasants but also bad luck for us wild birds.”

“Why’s that ?”

“Well, if any of us happen to be nearby they will have a shot at us just for fun.”

“And is that what happened to your brother?”

“Yes. Lucky for him the lead shot pellets only damaged a few upper wing feathers so he was still able to use his good wing to get out of range. Where he is now I don’t know so once you get out and about keep your eyes peeled and you might see him.”

Eduardo wasn’t too sure what peeled eyes were but knew he would be pleased to have a good look round.

“Sure. No problemo” he replied.

“Now, before you go, a few more tips. If you fish for your dinner in the pond or loch watch out for the striped ones. They are called perch and have sharp spines on their back which can stick in your throat and choke you. Also when you are paddling in the shallow waters of the marsh watch out for the otter, a fast moving, sharp toothed animal who if hungry might well grab your leg. So goodbye for now” and with that off he flew.

Eduardo’s mind was spinning with all this new information. What he did know was that he had to keep out of sight and find a safe place to settle down so he moved away from the river into the marsh. “Well that’s one friendly face so things are looking up. Now all I need is dinner.”

Some deep prodding with his long bill soon found a frog and worm to keep him going. Eduardo was now ready for a deep sleep.

For a day and a night he had been blown northwards and as we know his first day in his new home had nearly ended in disaster. Thankful for Harold’s help and advice, he now flew up into a willow tree to perch and sleep, well away from any passing otter.

Daybreak saw him fly down from the tree and paddle into the marsh where reeds and sedges were dense and tall. Probing for worms was hard concentrated work. So preoccupied with searching for breakfast, Eduardo was stunned to turn a corner and bump into a large grey bird with a big white patch on its wing where feathers should have been. He was looking very fed up. Eduardo knew at once who it was and said “you must be Harold’s brother.”

“True, Henry by name and as you can see not exactly fighting fit.”

“Well, we will have to do something about that. I’m Eduardo by the way.”

“I can’t quite believe my eyes,” Henry exclaimed, “ a pure white tiny heron, where have you come from?”

“I will get your brother to tell you my story. I am off to give him the good news that I have found you and that you are ok.” With a flap of his white wings Eduardo was up and away.

It didn’t take him long to spot Harold in his tree top lookout and give him the good news.

“Cousin Eduardo I am so grateful. I’ll catch some food and take it to him, keep him warm until his feathers grow back. He’ll be as good as new.”

Eduardo flew off to explore his new environment a bit more, while feeling very pleased that he had already been able to help his fellow birds. As he flew over the river and adjoining wetland he noticed many dark shapes reflected in the surface water. Black was not a colour he was familiar with in his Portuguese home. There, birds were colourful and white. Puzzled, he looked up into the sky to see what was casting these shadows. A huge number of large black birds, jackdaws and rooks, all calling loudly to each other were directly above him. Moreover, he could see that they were flying down towards him.

“I hope they are going to be friendly” he said to himself. He was about to be disappointed.

NOW FOR CARYS

The calling of these unfamiliar bird echoed and rang down the valley below. Back in Portugal there had only been fun and laughter but here it was very different. A lump stuck in Eduardo’s throat causing him to cough and splutter. “Hello there little one”, called out one of the big jackdaws, a really big jackdaw.

“H...hello” replied Eduardo.

“Come with us”, said the jackdaw, we have something to show you.” So Eduardo followed the birds for miles on end. His wings were exhausted and his body was weak, trailing behind him. Still, he kept on flying. The wind blew him left and right, up and down, until he reached a nest. It had something in it but Eduardo couldn’t make out what it was. He flew closer and closer until he saw it. “Harold?”

BACK TO GRANDPA

“Harold is that you”? Eduardo called out in a very weak voice.

“It is. Now what are you doing so far from the river bank where I last saw you. And more importantly why are you in the company of that lot, the jackdaw and rook crowd.”

“ They told me to go with them because they had something to show me”.

“Just as well you came across me again then. That cackling crew are not to be trusted. They are always out and about looking for mischief. A lone rare white bird like you is easy to pick on.” A sudden flap of his big broad wings took Harold up into the flock of the black birds. “Be off with you. Something to show this new arrival to the neighbourhood? What nonsense . You were just frightening him for a laugh. Shame on you. Now clear off.” And they did, wary of the power of the big broad wings.

“Come up here and rest awhile” Harold said to Eduardo. “ You’ll need to be a bit less trusting while you settle into your new home. Not all birds are friendly.” Eduardo was happy to oblige, glad to be able to rest after his ordeal. Once he had got his breath back he looked around and saw that

Harold was standing on a big platform of small sticks and twigs which was firmly resting on a branch of a coniferous tree. "That is an impressive nest cousin, who is it for?"

"Well", answered Eduardo, "it is the start of a big project. My brother Henry will be joining me soon now his wing is on the mend. Together with a couple of other grey herons we will build a few nests. With a bit of luck our female herons will like what they see and join us in forming a heron community. We call it a heronry. Who knows it might lead to some eggs being laid and baby herons hatching out."

"Wow, that is a big project, a good one too with you and your friends and family all together." Harold noticed that there was a note of sadness in his voice and quickly answered "of course we will always be open to visits from cousins".

"That's very kind and good to know", replied Eduardo, anyway I'll be off now to explore this strange new home a bit more."

"Well take care. Remember keep your wits about you."

"Yes, after being given the run around by those black birds I will be on my guard."

With that Eduardo flew from the heronry and out high above the river. It was getting late, time to find a safe place to roost and sleep ready for another day. Next thing he knew was that a huge swirling black cloud had engulfed him and was sweeping him high into the air. "Get out the way" a number of small black birds chirped at him in shrill voices, "we are in a hurry, off to our roosting place, besides you're not one of us, you are not a starling" Eduardo was alarmed at first at being swept along and then a little annoyed. "No I am not, but there's no need to be so short tempered. You should have avoided me after all my plumage is easy to spot in the dusk". There was no answer as a quick twist of the flock of the starlings released Eduardo and left him alone again. The flock of starlings had disappeared in an instant as the entire murmuration dropped into a large beech tree to rest for the night. "What is it about all these black birds, big or small that makes them so naughty and bad tempered?" wondered Eduardo as he descended into a dense patch of rushes to hide away and sleep. It was though a puzzle which would return at daybreak.

Little did he know but Eduardo was being caught up in a feud between Harold, Henry and their heron friends and the larger corvid family of rooks, jackdaws, and carrion crows along with their buddies, the starlings. It was a dispute over nesting and roosting sites. Corvids and starlings often roost high in trees, while crows nest there and rooks nest together in rookeries. This year it so happened that Harold and Henry had started to build their heronry in a wood which the rooks had chosen for their rookery and in which starlings roosted at night. They had called on their larger crow cousins to sort things out. As a result stuff had been happening. Crows had dive bombed the herons into leaving the heronry allowing the rooks to dismantle the nests. Good acrobatic flyers, the crows seemed to rule over everything.

More than that there were lots of corvids about to cause havoc. This was why Harold's advice about not trusting all birds had been offered to Eduardo for a good reason. Now as he awoke from his slumbers, Eduardo was about to find this out for himself for the second time.

Two big black shapes flew down into the marsh and landed before him. "So mystery white bird, you are a cousin of our neighbours the herons. We have heard all about your presence here from our cousins the rooks, jackdaws and their friends the starlings. Well we've got news for you. You are not welcome here. Herons are one thing, annoying though they are, but incomers from afar, that's something different." Eduardo backed away frightened by the nasty tone of their voices and the sight of their big, sharp beaks. "Where will it all end?" they continued, though they didn't wait for an answer. "Your mates will soon be here and we will be crowded out. As it is there's not enough trees for us all to nest in and food is in short supply".

Eduardo was dumbstruck by the unpleasantness. Still he tried to explain. "I've nowhere to go. I am not here by choice. A freak wind blew me here". I am all alone." The crows peered at him through dark eyes, unwavering in their resolve. "That's your problem" was their sharp response. "We'll give you a week to move on and leave our valley". They left without saying what would happen if Eduardo did not depart though from their fierce look and harsh cackle he knew they meant business.

Eduardo was downhearted, his crest drooped and his head dropped. Life was so different in Portugal. White birds, coloured birds, big birds, small birds, there they all got on with each other. "Are there no birds like that here? Are they all black and bossy in this chilly place?"

BACK TO CARYS.

Feeling rejected and unwanted, he flew away high into the tree tops. He knew that he would have to leave or pay a price. His wings ached and his legs could not move so he perched upon a nearby branch to rest his worn and weak body. Eduardo's eyes slowly closed and before he knew it he was fast asleep. He slept for days, for too long. As he awakened days later he realised he was not where he first fell asleep. He was far away. What could have happened? What force had plucked him from the tree tops and spirited him away, away from the hostile black birds? He looked around:

“ a shadow flew by
A bird flew high
With the wings of an angel,
The Night's Angel”

Eduardo was confused, not sure what he was seeing:

“ a cloudy shape
a wire like beak
and claws as red
as sticks of fire.”

What could this strange bird like figure be? Friend or foe? The signs were not good for as it drew closer its cloudy, charcoal black shape looked like a bigger version of the birds who had threatened him back in the valley. Eduardo shuddered, fearing the worst.

BACK TO GRANDPA.

“Fear not little one. You are safe here for I am the Night’s Angel protector of all birds who are unjustly treated.” Eduardo breathed a big sigh of relief.

“Well, thank you Night Angel. I was in a spot of bother back in that river valley. Some black birds seemed to think I was going to cause problems for them and they started to get nasty.”

“I know, I saw it all and swooped down to scatter them and bring you here for a while to a safe place.”

“Well I am truly grateful. You are a Night Angel and a guardian one too”

“Well thank you. My colour shouldn’t be a cause for alarm. It is very useful for flying around in the dark for no one can see me and I can go about my job of helping vulnerable birds. The night is my friend. Still back to you. You can’t really stay here all alone.”

“No” Eduardo occurred sadly. “I quite liked it in the valley. Harry and Henry were friendly and long beaked and long legged like me. It was a pity I was wrongly dragged into their arguments with the different black birds about who could live in the wood.”

The Night Angel looked thoughtful. “I need to fix this. I can’t leave this rescue job unfinished. We need a conference of all the birds to thrash out this dispute and make the valley safe for my little egret friend here. Who can I turn to for advice? After all there are not many birds around at this time of day when I am busy.”

Just as he was in deep thought a white shape flew by in elegant bouncing flight, its head swivelling from left to right, big eyes looking everywhere. The bird caught sight of the white and black shapes of Eduardo and the Night Angel perched in the tree.

“Good morning to you”, the bird said cheerfully. “It’s not often that I bump into other birds at this early hour, especially a fellow all white one like me. I’m Barney, the barn owl by the way.

“I am Eduardo, a white egret. This is my friend” he added gesturing towards the Night Angel.

“Not seen birds like you two before and I am generally regarded as wise and well travelled. How exciting.”

The Night Angel replied in a solemn voice. “Mr Barn Owl my friend here needs help. He has been blown here from the south and was greeted with hostility by a gaggle of black birds just because he was a newcomer.”

“The Night Angel saved me” interjected Eduardo.

“As you can see I am an unusual bird, secretive, a bird of the deep night hours whose job it is to look after feathered friends in distress. When day

breaks I retreat to the most secretive places to rest. I can see though that what is needed is a conference of birds; a meeting of all the birds back in the valley and see what is bugging them all”.

Barney sensed the dilemmas presented by his discovery of this unusual pair and their story and was eager to help. “I am not a wise owl for nothing”, he reminded himself so what can I do?

“For sure the crows, rooks, jackdaws and starlings can come across as bossy and noisy”, he said, “ There is one black bird, though, who even they hold in high respect and would listen to.”

“Who is that?” Asked the Night Angel?”

“The Raven” replied the barn owl.

“Not sure I’ve made his acquaintance”, said Night Angel.

“No he lives high up in the hills, up on the crags and looks down on us all, big, black and master of the skies. Tell you what I’ll head up there at dusk and tell him what you have told me. Perhaps together we could carry on your good work, arrange the meeting you talked about and bring all black and white birds together along with all those in between. After all we all live in the valley.”

“That would be a great help. I have to go now, day is breaking , my job is done.”

“Leave it it’s me Night Angel. Come on Eduardo you can hang out with me today. Then we’ll head into the hills at dusk and seek out Raven.

Perched on his looking place high in the crags, Raven saw them approach up through the steep sided gorge. “Interesting”, he murmured to himself. “An odd couple for sure. What could they want up here?” And with that he flew high above them, pirouetted in the air, clapped his wings and swept down to meet them.

Eduardo had never seen such a big black bird. Raven had never seen such an elegant all white bird. Barney did the introductions and quickly added that they were on their way to meet him. Raven looked down at them before adding “well it must be something important to bring you all the way up here”. And Barney proceeded to tell him their story. Raven listened attentively before adding “I am not totally surprised. I have seen the aerial tussles between the rooks and the herons. Fuss about nothing. Bullying a fellow bird though, well that is a different matter. It is disgraceful behaviour. After all there is so much going on these days which affects all birds that arguing amongst ourselves is pointless.”

Barney listened carefully, encouraged by what he was hearing, so much so that he was about to say “ so do you think a conference of all the birds would help restore some common sense”? When Raven announced “ what we need is a conference of birds.” Barney was speechless, even more so when Raven added “Barney you are respected amongst all birds for your wisdom. Spread the word amongst all birds, especially those with white

feathers. I will lay down the law with my black cousins. Let's say we 'll all meet in a week down in the valley."

"Sounds like a good plan. There is a big clearing in the middle of a gorse thicket. "We'll be safe and private there, out of harm's way.

"I know it", said Raven. " I've noticed it from above when I am high in the sky. See you there."

And so it came to pass. Raven swooped here and there, issuing orders which no black bird dare question. Barney left Eduardo with Harry and Henry while he whizzed around at dawn and dusk telling dipper, coot, pied wagtail, white throat, in fact all birds with a touch of white in their plumage, about the conference. Next he sought out the brightly coloured bird cousins, kingfisher, bullfinch, goldfinch and blue tit.

What an assembly it turned out to be. No one there gathered in the clearing really knew what the meeting was about though the white birds sensed that the arrival of their white neighbour might have something to do with it. Word had got round that his all white feathers had attracted attention and hostility though no one was sure why. Anyway they all gathered to find out more.

As for Harry, Henry the herons and the black gang of crows, rooks and starlings, well, deep down they knew they would be under scrutiny for the kerfuffle they had created about nesting rights in the wood. Being bold and noisy, the corvids had not taken kindly to being ordered to attend, but knew that after Raven had paid them a visit they had no choice.

When years later the bird community recalled this day they did so with gratitude and amazement. Youngsters tried to picture the sight of birds of all shapes and sizes, land birds, water birds, birds at home in the sky, birds of the woods, all gathered side by side with the big black bird and white owl calling them to order.

Raven spoke first, his large wings spread out wide in a demand for quiet.

"There is trouble in our valley, bad feeling is on the rise. This is something we birds can ill afford for it sets bird against bird when unity is what we need."

To his surprise he was stopped in full flow by a sharp beaked rook.

"What do you know of our life down here when you live high up in th crags and fly around all day. Herons are taking over our wood and now it seems they are to be joined by their long legged cousins from afar. This wee white chappy over there is just the start of an invasion. Then what will become of us? No nesting places, less food. Where will it all end?"

Raven looked down at his bold inquisitor and replied calmly, "fellow black bird from my world high above I am able to see far and wide and so am privy to a bigger picture than the one you see in your world." Again, before he could finish, a white chested dipper blinked its white rimmed eyelid at Barney and asked "permission to speak." Barney looked at Raven who slightly miffed at being interrupted, nevertheless said "of course let dipper speak."

“ Look Rook I for one am sick of this. You seem to have a thing about birds who have white feathers. Well us dippers” and he patted his white chest “ take offence at that.”

“Hear, hear”, echoed white throat, “ who do you think you are?”

“ Besides” added coot and pied wagtail, “ we are both black and white and proud of it so be warned. Carry on with that sort of chat and you will end up with no friends round here.”

“Don’t drag us into it”, said the starlings. “We are not black, we are all shiny if you look closely.” And so it went on. Emboldened by the chat, some of the shyer birds added their voices.

“Look at me”, said Kingfisher, “I’m all blue, does that mean you will pick on me for not being black?”

“Yes”, chirped up Goldfinch, “ As you can see I am red, gold, brown, white and black so where do I fit in to your world of likes and dislikes, eh Rook”?

Raven intervened “alright, alright, calm down everybody. I have heard enough. I need to call the conference to order.” Barney chipped in too. “ Yes things need sorting out. The dispute between the herons and rooks is one thing and we have all noticed that recently but the bullying of a fellow bird, a visitor here, well that is a bigger problem.”

“What the wise owl says is true, Raven added “ though from where I sit and fly everyday looking far and wide I can tell you of other problems which all us birds are facing.” A quiet stillness descended on the assembled throng.

Barney broke the silence, “first things first, regarding nesting sites in the wood, it is simple. Rooks you build in the deciduous trees, herons the coniferous and the following year you exchange locations.” This solution was so sensible, so obvious that the rooks and herons were stunned into silence, embarrassed that they had not worked it out for themselves. Raven whispered to Barney, “my friend you are not known as the wise owl for nothing.” Then he went on, “ second item on the conference agenda, bullying of our new arrival, Eduardo the egret. Let him tell his story and maybe all of us can get a better understanding.”

Eduardo moved to the centre of the circle of birds. He was tired after his ordeal and rescue by the Night Angel but took a deep breath and began, “ Fellow birds, my home in the deep south is under threat, summers are getting hotter, our lagoons are drying up and our trees are literally going up in smoke. There is less food to eat and nowhere to nest. Call it fate if you like but that same wind has blown me here in search of a new home. My fellow egrets will need one too. I ask you on behalf of myself and them to find a corner of your land for us to live in. Our needs are simple. We carry no threat.” It was an impassioned speech. All present at the conference were silent. Barney raised his big round eyes and looked at them all. “Fellow birds I take it that your silence is actually speaking volumes. He noticed the rooks and their cousins shamefully and gravely nodding agreement and so continued. “ On behalf of us all Eduardo, I am proud to say that you and fellow egrets are welcome here. What is ours will be yours. You are exotic,

you are different, you will brighten the place up, so welcome. You are after all a bird like us.”

A hum of approval amongst the gathering led to a ripple of applause which quietened when a solitary male blackbird boldly flew down into the arena. “Permission to speak”, he asked. “Granted” replied Raven.

“Like many here I endorse all that Barney has said. If there are any doubters left amongst you let me tell you this. No bird is as black as us blackbirds. What you may not know or indeed have seen is that Mother Nature occasionally works in mysterious ways in the world of blackbirds. And guess what?” He paused, dramatising his announcement. “Now and again she creates an all white blackbird, yes all white. It is called an albino. This bird sings the same, lays the same eggs, builds the same nest as black birds but is white not black.”

“It is true,” said Raven, “I have seen this bird with my own eyes.” The blackbird went on “so black, white, a bit of both or rainbow coloured, the heart of the matter is that we are all birds. We are all brothers and sisters blessed with flight and song. Please remember that and do not judge fellow birds by their appearance.” It was a fine speech.

Raven let its message sink in before continuing. “Item three on the agenda is where I bring my knowledge to bear. As I said earlier, from my home in the sky I can see far and wide way beyond your valley. Change is coming, not yet as scary and destructive as the forces which brought Eduardo here but worrying enough.”

“What do you mean all the birds called out together?”

“Humans are squeezing us out of the natural world. Wetlands are being drained, rivers poisoned, hedges uprooted and soils eroded. We have been quite lucky here in the valley avoiding some of this but I can see from above that it is coming our way. On top of it all as Eduardo’s presence testifies, the world is getting too warm for all creatures.”

“What can we do?” Came the cry of alarm from the conference of birds.”

“Look after each other, share resources, adapt by trying new foods, new nesting places. It will buy us time,” said an impassioned Raven

“Time for what” they all asked.

“To hold on to life and wait, wait for humans to mend their ways and respect the planet and all of us who live on it.” Sensing that this might be a wait in vain, Raven went on. “Now and again though we might need to drop them a big hint that all is far from well.”

“And what might that entail” a voice was heard from the conference.

“Act out of character, cause mischief, demand their attention” continued Raven. Intrigued herons and all the corvids called out as one, “how, give us a clue!”

“Well herons might ignore fish in garden ponds and instead descend on humans’ prize garden flowers and gobble up the petals, then ravage brussel sprouts for good measure. That would show just how hungry fish eaters might be even if they weren’t that hungry.” Raven was on a roll now. “And

rooks, well you are super bold and inventive. So set about peoples' car and cycle tyres. Jackdaws carry on the good work and stuff yet more twigs down chimneys. Let's all think of ways to draw their attention to a troubled world and encourage them to see the light."

There was much laughter at the thought of such acts of nuisance and sabotage. All the birds started to swop ideas about what they could do. Things were coming to an end in this spirit of understanding and resolve when a flock of swallows flew by. One descended to get a closer look at the strange sight of all the birds, especially the pure white one.

"Crikey, an egret. What are you doing here. Last time I saw one like you was down south a month ago as we flew over, heading north for the summer."

Eduardo replied simply " long story, short. Fate brought me here". Swallow looked around at all the birds and boldly said " well you lot I hope you have made this handsome fellow feel welcome and at home for he is a long way from family and friends. His kin down south always welcome us back each year. After all us birds need to stick together. We are all guardian angels."

Raven looked at Barney and they both nodded their approval at the swallow's timely and sensible words. "Hope is truly a thing with feathers" , Barney said. "Agreed my wise friend, replied Raven.

Story by Carys and Grandpa.
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