

The Bird Who Could Only Smile

High up in the cloud forests of Colombia, a bushbird was sitting in a bamboo bush, feeling lonely. He called out to the leaping monkeys and glistening frogs, the slithering snakes and the chattering toucans, but they all passed him by with a smile and a wave.

"Don't you look happy today!" they said, for Bushbird had a problem... his beak curved up in an upturned line so no matter how hard he tried to frown, he could only ever smile.



"I'm NOT happy today! Bushbird cried, "I'm lonely!" But no one took any notice. Bushbird always seemed so happy, they thought, he didn't need any friends. So instead Bushbird sat on his branch and covered his head with his wing.

At last, a little howler monkey stopped by his side and peered at the sooty bundle of feathers bunched down on the end of the branch. "Is that you, Bushbird?" he asked. Under his wing, Bushbird nodded.



"Are you alright?" asked the howler monkey. "I've never seen you like this, are you feeling sad?"

"I am," croaked Bushbird. "Oh I am!"



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So the little monkey howled as loud as he could. "Come quick!" he called, "Bushbird is feeling sad." There was a flurry of wings and a pounding of feet and the branches shook as all the other animals came rushing over. "Poor Bushbird," they said, "come out from under your wing, we'll comfort you."

So Bushbird peered out from behind his feathers to show his beaming, curving smile. The little howler monkey gasped in surprise. "You tricked me!" he cried. "Ha!" cackled a parakeet, "you're as happy as ever - we can see."

"No... come back!" cried Bushbird, but the animals all turned away.

"There must be a way to show them how lonely I am," thought Bushbird, and at last, as night fell he knew how to do it. As the moon sank down behind the clouds, Bushbird began to sing. He sang of lonely days and long dark nights and the sadness behind his smile.

The monkeys woke up and heard his haunting song. Baby monkeys crept close to their mothers for comfort, and their mothers hugged them closer still. The frogs' skins prickled with sadness and even the viper felt tears sting his eyes.



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"Who could be singing this sad, sad song?" they wondered.

They followed the sound to the bamboo bush where the bushbird sang in the dark. But as they gazed up with pity-filled eyes, the clouds began to part and a glimmer of moonlight lit up the bushbird's smile.

"What a horrible trick to play!" cried the glistening golden frogs.

"Once was funny - twice is too much," huffed the howler monkeys.

"Look at your gloating smile," added the viper, "you're as happy as you ever were. Get away!"

So Bushbird flew far, far away. He flew all through the dark night. "I'll live by myself," he decided. "I can't be any lonelier than I am now."



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When morning broke, he found himself in the most secret part of the forest. The only sounds were the rustling leaves... and a creature, rooting around on the ground. It had funny pointy feet and a stubby little tail, but the strangest of all was its droopy snout that dangled over its chin.

"Who are you?" asked Bushbird.

"I'm a tapir," the creature replied.

"You look just how I feel!" said Bushbird, gazing at the tapir's sorrowful face.



"This is how tapir's always look," the creature replied, "no matter how happy we are. I think you need to look into a creature's eyes to see how they feel inside."



From that day on, the bushbird and the tapir were the best of friends. Each knew exactly how the other felt... even though one always wore a frown, and the other a glorious, curling smile.