

Lizzie and Maggie

Once upon a time, in a hole beneath the pond in Nanny's Garden, there lived a contented Blue Tongue Lizard named Lizzie. Lizzie's hole wasn't a gross, mouldy hole, filled with spiders, ear-wiggles and snails. It wasn't smelly, or slimy. It was just a grey hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a Lizard-hole, and that means shelter.

Nanny's Garden was just one part of the land of Backyard, which stretched all the way into the distance, over the great green plains of Lawn. Bordered on one side by the dominant, mountainous House, and by Fence on the other side, Backyard was a sweeping, picturesque country full of strange, but beautiful creatures and peppered with features both mysterious and wonderful. To her left, under the backdrop of the towering walls of House, Lizzie could easily see the great city of Patio, even from the entrance to her hole. If she crept outside and crawled up the banks of the pond to take a drink, which she did when there were no Monsters around, she could see even further. Patio, she knew, was where Maggie hunted. Maggie was a rather large, noisy Magpie, and Lizzie could watch her for hours.

"Here's some lovely bits," warbled Maggie, as she came to rest on the glass-topped table that was the main feature of Patio. There were always a few pieces of delicious food scattered around the place, and if Maggie was still hungry, all she had to do was warble and crow for a while and out popped a Monster with a few more tasty tit-bits. "And I do believe that's a bottle-top," she exclaimed, excitedly, as she set about throwing it into the air, just to listen to it clink and tinkle on the glass table-top. Byron, Maggie's husband, wasn't as noisy as Maggie, and preferred to get his food in a more traditional manner, pecking for grubs and worms on the ground. But Lizzie caught him peeking enviously at Maggie as she gobbled up the fresh food that was conveniently placed on a saucer on the table.

From the banks of the pond in Nanny's Garden, Lizzie watched Maggie frolicking on the table in Patio. Even at this distance, Lizzie could hear the chatty Magpie quite clearly, and could see all the shenanigans that Maggie usually got up to every day. Once all the food had been gobbled up, and the bottle top game had ceased amusing the talkative Magpie, Maggie jumped from the table to the chair, leaving her "signature" behind her as a sort of calling-card for the Monsters who came in and out of the huge, walled city of House. Then Maggie would flit across Backyard with Byron, visiting all the creatures who lived there to spread her gossip.

Lizzie looked forward to Maggie's visits to Nanny's Garden, even though Maggie chattered and blabbered and gargled for hours and hours at a time. Lizzie thought Maggie was lucky to have seen so much of the world as she flew from tree to Swing-Set to the peaks of Hills-Hoist, all around the country of Backyard and beyond. At night, long after Maggie had flown away to her own nest (wherever that was, wondered Lizzie) she would look up at the stars and wonder what it would be like to venture beyond Nanny's Garden, to slither across the plains of Lawn, perhaps even to the other end of Backyard where lay the mysterious island of Pergola! But the thought of leaving her nice, cosy hole with the tinkling pond above and the shrubs and bushes that protected her and

provided her with lovely, juicy insects to eat, was too much to bear. Sometimes, when she slinked to the top of the pond for a drink, and if it was a clear day, she could look over the high cliffs of Retaining Wall and make out the distant mountain of Hills-Hoist. Pergola, so she was told, was way beyond that, past the vast, ever green plains of Lawn. Maggie had been there. In fact, it was Maggie who told her all about the places beyond Retaining Wall, beyond Lawn!

When you finally reach the end of the great plains of Lawn, the mighty island of Pergola comes into view! It's a beautiful place, shrouded on three sides by twisting, green vines, and on the fourth by the flat, green plains of Lawn. Pergola is a haven for all creatures, even Monsters. Here there is sanctuary. Galahs and Rosellas eat seeds and drink fresh rainwater from the feeders hung high in the Wisteria vines. Frogs croak as they splash around in the Doodle Pond, while Monsters lie in the giant hammock as it swings ever so slightly in the gentle breeze.

Lizzie dreamed of Pergola every night, always waking with a sense that, one day, she would visit there. When there were no Monsters, of course!

Not that there was a lack of adventure in Lizzie's life! Every now and then, Monsters would emerge from House, sometimes one, sometimes two, but sometimes there would be a whole bunch of them! Almost every time, one of the Monsters would bring a waterfall over to Nanny's Garden and replenish the water in the pond. Lizzie knew if she lay still and quiet, the Monsters would not know she was there, hiding deep within her hole. Maggie, on the other hand, would warble and squawk among the Monsters, who would throw her scraps of food as a kind of reward for all her yakking and swooping, which seemed to amuse the Monsters no end. Lizzie guessed that they loved to hear Maggie's gossip just as much as she did, although she doubted they could understand her.

Sometimes, the Monsters would decorate the mountains of Hills-Hoist with giant, flapping flags that they called "clothes," and sometimes they'd all sit around the great Table of Patio and eat, drink and talk about all kinds of things. These occasions were usually accompanied by the eruption of Mt. Barby, the giant volcano that sat to one side of Patio. Huge slabs of flesh would be thrown into the great maw of the volcano, only to be plucked from within to feed the Monsters gathered at the Table. Maggie and her clan would wait at the edges where the green plains of Lawn met Patio, and scoop up the scraps discarded by the Monsters. Maggie would drop some of the scraps in Nanny's Garden, and Lizzie would venture out of her hole at night, when all was quiet, to enjoy the tasty morsels.

Monsters

One bright, hot, sunny day, the Monsters emerged from House and had a particularly long and noisy gathering. Mount Barby erupted, and soon there were Monsters gathered around it, throwing carcasses into its huge crater. One of the smaller Monsters came to Nanny's Garden with the waterfall, and Lizzie ducked into her hole to hide. Whether it was because the small Monster was closer to the ground, or whether Lizzie didn't hide herself properly, the little Monster saw Lizzie's head poking out of her hole. Lizzie, staying perfectly still, stared at the Monster and willed it to look away. But the Monster, forgetting that she was still holding the waterfall, smiled and leaned down to get a closer look at Lizzie. When she could see all the way down Lizzie's hole, she opened her mouth and gasped! Then, slowly, she reached her hand out. Closer, closer, the Monster's hand came to Lizzie's head, the giant fingers curling as it came toward her.

Lizzie knew that this Monster was what Maggie called a "little girl." Apart from the fact that she was much smaller than most of the other Monsters, that's all Lizzie knew. For as long as she could remember, Lizzie had never been threatened by Monsters, who had left her alone to enjoy her life beneath the pond in Nanny's Garden.

But all that was about to change!

What can I do? Lizzie thought to herself, frantically! Shall I bite her? Shall I run away? Lizzie slowly, slowly opened her mouth. So slowly the child didn't notice. As her hand came closer, Lizzie's mouth opened wider, exposing row upon row of blunt teeth, ready to clamp down on the pink fingers of the Monster. Just as Lizzie was about to strike, Maggie swooped down to the pond and squawked, startling the Monster.

"Get away from Lizzie!" cried Maggie, flapping her wings at the Monster, who, by now, was spraying the giant waterfall over everything but the pond in Nanny's Garden.

"Magpie!" shouted the Monster with glee! "Maggie the Magpie is dancing!" she yelled, laughing.

"Go away!" screeched Maggie, but the little girl continued to laugh with joy and jump up and down, sending the waterfall to all parts of Backyard. Lizzie took the opportunity to slink way down deep into her hole, out of sight of the Monster.

Later that night, after everything had calmed down and the Monsters had all wandered back behind the great walls of House, Maggie fluttered down to perch on the banks of the pond.

"Lizzie!" cried Maggie.

"Maggie?" said Lizzie, popping her head out from her hole. "What are you doing here? It's almost night time!"

Usually, Maggie would be back in her nest well before it got fully dark.

"The Monster saw you. The little girl."

"Yes, Maggie, I know. But she's gone now."

"She'll be back. All little Monsters are the same. Curious. Annoying. You'll never get any peace."

Lizzie thought about this. She enjoyed her life of solitude in Nanny's Garden. It was the quiet end of Backyard, and she wanted it to stay that way. To have that solitude interrupted by Monsters was depressing.

"Maybe she'll forget she saw me. But even so, I'll hide deeper in my hole if I see her again."

Maggie sighed. "As you wish. But Lizzie, you mustn't bite her. If she comes back, and she reaches for you, DO NOT BITE HER!"

"And why not?" said Lizzie, slightly annoyed at Maggie. "It's my hole, and I need to protect it!"

Maggie's voice took on a tone of urgency that Lizzie had never heard before. "Lizzie, there are good Monsters and bad Monsters. These ones are GOOD! But if you bite her, the other Monsters will come for you. They'll take you away, maybe far away!"

The warning in Maggie's words was crystal clear. "Alright, Maggie. I'll try not to bite her if she comes back. IF she comes back!"

"Oh, she'll be back, alright. Not tomorrow, or the next day, but soon. She's what the bigger Monsters call Granddaughter, and they are very protective of her. Just be careful!"

"I will," Lizzie assured her friend.

At that, Maggie warbled once more and flew away to her nest.

Lizzie and Maggie, Car and Fox

The next day was quiet enough. Lizzie came out of her hole for a drink and to soak up the morning sunshine, but a Monster came from House with clothes to hang from Hills-Hoist. Lizzie scurried back to her hole, and watched closely. When Hills-Hoist was completely covered, the Monster came over to Nanny's Garden with the waterfall and filled the pond to brimming. Then the Monster did a strange thing. It stopped the waterfall, then bent down over Lizzy's hole. Lizzy was sure she couldn't be seen, but the Monster smiled and said, "Hello Lizzy!" then turned and walked away.

"What did I tell you!" squawked Maggie, when the Monster had gone inside House. The noisy Magpie had been watching from the trees with Byron, and swooped down to Nanny's Garden.

"Th...the Monster...." stammered Lizzy. "The Monster spoke to me! She said 'Hello Lizzy!'"

"Well, of course she did. She says the same thing to me, too. They all do. 'Hello Maggie', she says, 'Here's some nice mince for you,' and she throws me some balls of meat. All I do is warble a bit, do a dance or two, and I've fed the entire family!"

Lizzy thought about this. Her blue tongue darted in and out of her mouth, testing the air. She always did this when she was nervous, or brooding. Her big, brown eyes stared out at the familiar surroundings of Nanny's Garden. She frowned, deep in thought, remembering clearly the Monster's face as she said 'Hello Lizzy!'"

Then it struck her! "How come the Monster knows my name? And yours?" asked Lizzie.

Maggie sighed, as if relieved of a great burden. "You don't remember, do you?" she warbled.

"Remember what?"

"The Monster named you. When you were a baby. When they rescued you."

Lizzie looked at Maggie, stunned. "Wha....what do you mean? Rescued me?"

"Have you ever heard of Car?"

"Car?" No, I don't think so. What is Car?"

"Car is a giant beast, bigger than a Monster! In fact, it carries Monsters in its belly."

"Oh, my!" exclaimed Lizzie. "That doesn't sound good!"

"No. They are rather scary, but stupid. Well, Car trod on your tail!"

Lizzie gasped! "My....TAIL?"

"Yep. A Monster found you, lying still on the ground, half your tail missing, your back legs mangled, and nursed you back to health. They put you here, in Nanny's Garden, because you can't move around like you used to."

Lizzie thought and thought, trying to remember her life before Nanny's Garden. But she couldn't. She just couldn't.

"Nanny's Garden is the only life I've ever known," Lizzie said in wonder. "My hole, the pond, these shrubs and bushes – I can't ever remember being anywhere else."

Maggie cocked her head to one side, as if deciding on the right words. "Lizzie, you were very badly injured. It's no wonder you can't remember, and your tail has mostly grown back. So what if your memories only start from after your rescue? This is a NICE place to live. Better than being splattered by Car, or, worse still, being eaten by a fox!"

Lizzie looked curiously at Maggie. "What do you mean?"

Maggie sighed. "Well, Lizzie, I was rescued, too. When I was a tiny baby, I fell out of my nest. I didn't have many tail-feathers, so I couldn't fly very well, but I managed to land on the ground unhurt. My parents were watching over me, and my Dad came down to keep me safe. I'd have to learn how to fly so I could get back to the nest. I was so frightened, down there on the ground. But Dad found a safe place for me."

Lizzie was enthralled by Maggie's story. "So why didn't your Dad carry you back to the nest?" she asked.

Maggie laughed. "Magpies can't carry their babies when they fly, silly!"

"So what did you do?"

"Well, Dad taught me how to flap my wings properly, but until I grew a few more tail feathers, I was stuck on the ground. And then...." Maggie trailed off as her eyes reflected her sadness.

"Then what?" asked Lizzie. "What happened?"

"A fox happened, that's what!" Maggie said angrily. "A fox! He came for me, and Dad attacked him, swooped him, pecked him! 'Run away,' he cried to me! 'Run away!'"

"Oh no!" said Lizzie.

"Oh yes," said Maggie, sadly. "I flapped, ran, flapped, as hard as I could! The fox was yelping, Dad was on the ground, his wing broken, but he kept attacking, pecking, flapping his good wing, and trying to keep the fox away from me. I kept running, and soon I heard the fox coming after me. I knew my Dad was gone, and I wanted to just stop and go to him. But he had told me to run, and so I did. The next thing I remember was a Monster chasing the fox away, and picking me up off the ground. I was exhausted, I couldn't have run any further. But the Monster took me to House, and fed me. Over the next few days, they helped me look for my Mum. They looked for our nest, but couldn't find it. Eventually, I learned to fly, and House and Backyard became my home. I never saw my Mum and Dad again."

"Where is the fox? Will it come back?"

Maggie laughed. "No, silly. The fox doesn't like Backyard, or House. They're more scared of Monsters than you are! We're safe here."

Lizzie was confused. "Aren't you scared of Monsters?"

Maggie laughed. "Not these ones! I told you before; there are GOOD Monsters and there are BAD Monsters. These ones are GOOD! They rescued you!"

"Then how did you....."

"Lizzie, this is only one country, one of many Backyards. I come from a long way away, the same as you. But I can fly from Backyard to Backyard. My nest is in another Backyard, but I come back here because the Monsters are friendly. That's why they rescued you."

"Oh," was all Lizzie could say.

"I also like coming here because you are my friend, and because I know you'll never be able to go anywhere beyond Nanny's Garden."

"Yes I will!" said Lizzie, with a determined voice. "One day, I'm going to Pergola!"

Maggie dropped her head and stared at the ground. "Oh, Lizzie," she sighed. "Sometimes I feel like I should never have told you about that place."

"But why?" asked Lizzie. "It sounds wonderful!"

"Oh, and it is." Maggie looked up into Lizzie's eyes and said, sadly, "But you don't have any back legs. You can barely crawl to the top of the pond to get a drink!"

Lizzie knew that there was something wrong with her, but she'd always avoided thinking about it. Maggie had never mentioned it before, but now that Lizzie knew what had happened to her, she was more curious than embarrassed by her predicament.

"So where are the Monsters that rescued you?" asked Lizzie.

"Oh, they live in another Backyard not far from here. They took me to a Backyard they call 'The Vet.' They rescue lots of animals there. In fact, Monsters rescue injured animals like us all the time, and take them to 'The Vet.'"

"They sound like nice animals, these Vets."

"Well, they are, but there are lots of Monsters who aren't so kind. Some Monsters just want to hurt us. You have to be careful."

Lizzie was getting tired. All this talk of Backyards, and Cars, and foxes and Vets – it was too much for the Blue Tongue to take in.

Maggie sighed. "Well, enough for tonight. I'll see you tomorrow, Lizzie."

"OK. Goodnight Maggie."

"Night Lizzie."

Lizzie Remembers

As Maggie flew off to her nest, Lizzie crawled way back into her hole to sleep. But sleep was a long time coming. Instead, she tried to remember. She tried very hard.

The ground was hard, black, and oh, so warm! Even in the middle of the night, the surface stayed balmy, as if it had soaked up the sunshine of the day and kept it just for her to enjoy. Her cold blood thawed, making her sleepy and slow. Which is why she didn't hear the giant Car before it was too late. BANG! And Lizzie's tail disappeared in an instant as she scurried to get out of the way. But something else was wrong – her back legs wouldn't move. She scrambled with her little front legs, but the smooth, dark surface was slippery on her tiny claws. She eventually made it onto the dirt at the edge, but she was exhausted, and in pain.

The next thing she remembered was being woken up by a Monster. In a panic, she bit down on the hand that picked her up off the ground, but the Monster ignored it. Lizzie tasted some sort of leathery skin that wasn't the Monster's. Later she would learn that they wore 'gloves' when they picked her up. The Monster laid her down inside a dark box with shredded newspaper on the bottom. She sensed movement, but didn't know where she was going. After what seemed hours in the dark, the box opened and the Monster reached in for her. Again, Lizzie bit down on the Monster's hand, but it had no effect. She let go of the finger and looked around, her blue tongue darting in and out constantly as the Monster laid her gently down on the ground next to a tinkling pond.

"You can live here, in Nanny's Garden, if you like," said the Monster. Lizzie lay perfectly still. "Bye Lizzie!" said the Monster.

Lizzie woke with a start. It was a bright, new, sunny day in Nanny's Garden. Maggie was already up and yakking away under Patio, pecking at crumbs and meaty tit-bits from the glass top of the table, her long, sharp beak making a loud 'tap-tap' noise on the glass table top.

"MAGGIE!" cried Lizzie, as she crawled out of her hole and clambered to the top of the pond.

"Maggie, I remember!"

Maggie stopped her pecking and flew over to Nanny's Garden. "What did you say?" she asked Lizzie.

"I remember! The Monster picked me up off the warm, black ground."

"That would be a 'road,' Lizzie."

"Yes, yes, the road. The giant Car had stepped on my tail, and it broke off, but it must have damaged my legs. The Monster put me in a box and brought me here."

"Well, you couldn't have got here on your own, could you?" warbled Maggie.

"Well, no, I suppose not," said Lizzie, sadly. "But, Maggie, I can't walk. I'll never be able to walk again, will I?"

Maggie couldn't answer her.

"No," said Lizzie. "I guess I won't. Which means I'll never get to see Pergola. Or travel across Lawn."

“Well, I wouldn’t give up just yet, Lizzie,” said Maggie. “You like it here in Nanny’s Garden, don’t you?”

“Well, yes, of course, but.....”

“I know you like adventure, and you’re curious. But it could be worse, right? The fox might have got you if the Monster didn’t get to you first. And you could have encountered a BAD Monster instead of the nice, kind one who lives here.”

“Yes, Maggie, you’re right, of course. I am happy here. I love Nanny’s Garden, and I have everything I need. But I wish....I wish I could see Pergola. Just once.”

Maggie said nothing. The sadness in Lizzie’s eyes said it all.

“Tell me again, Maggie. What’s Pergola like?”

Pergola!

The days passed, but for Lizzie, the excitement of each new morning just wasn't there anymore. She languished in the knowledge that she would never see much beyond Nanny's Garden, nice as it was. This made Maggie sad, to see her friend in such sorrow. Every day, the magpie cracked jokes, warbled incessantly, teased the Monsters and swooped the cat. This, alone, was usually enough to make Lizzie laugh out loud!

But not today.

Every other day, the Monster emerged from House, brought the waterfall over and topped up the pond.

"Mornin' Lizzie," said the Monster, as she came over to Nanny's Garden with the waterfall.

"See ya, Lizzie," she said, as she finished topping up the pond and watering the plants.

Then, one day, the 'little girl' came back. She ran straight over to Nanny's Garden and peered into Lizzie's hole.

"Hi Lizzie!" she cried. "Lizzie! Come out, Lizzie," said the little girl, in a sing-song voice.

"Go on, Lizzie," cried Maggie, alighting on the pond. "She won't hurt you."

Slowly, ever so slowly, Lizzie emerged from her hole. Trembling slightly, she dragged herself out using her front claws. First, her head popped out, and her blue tongue whipped in and out frantically.

"Hi Lizzie!" squealed the Monster.

Lizzie took a deep breath, then emerged a little further. Finally, she was all the way out of the hole. The Little Girl clapped her hands in delight.

"Nanny!" she cried. "Lizzie's out of her hole! Come see!"

Sure enough, the big Monster came over to Nanny's Garden. "Well, Hi there, Lizzie!" she said. "Long time, no see!"

"Can I pick her up?" said the Little Girl.

"No Pippy, she might bite."

"Close your gob, Lizzie!!" cawed Maggie.

Lizzie didn't even realise she had opened her mouth.

"No, Nanny, she won't bite. Look, she closed her mouth!"

The big Monster sighed. "Well, alright, but be very gentle. Her back legs don't work and if you squeeze her, it might hurt."

Slowly, gently, Pippy reached out to Lizzie and scooped her up off the ground. Lizzie tried to jerk back, but a loud CAW! From Maggie warned her to keep still. Then gradually, so as not to startle the blue tongue lizard, Pippy raised Lizzie to her eye level and looked straight at her.

“Hi Lizzie!” she whispered. “I’m Pippy. Where do you want to go?”

Lizzie looked at Pippy and blinked. Her blue tongue darted in and out, but she sensed no danger. Then she looked over the Monster’s shoulder. What she saw was amazing! Enthralled, her tongue stopped its incessant darting as she beheld the magnificence of Backyard! From this height, she could see across the great plains of Lawn, and, in the distance, the outline of what could only be..... PERGOLA!

“Pergola!” whispered Lizzie.

Pippy giggled, and placed Lizzie on her shoulder. Lizzie looked on in amazement as Pippy carried her around, towering above the cliffs of Retaining Wall. They walked carefully across Lawn, around Hills-Hoist heading towards Pergola. Gradually, as they got closer and closer, the island came into view. Blurry features, like the hammock, the wisteria vines, the small table, everything that Maggie had described to her came into perspective. Maggie swooped low over Pippy and landed on the top of Pergola on a branch of the twisting, green vines that curled in and around three sides and the roof of Pergola. With Lizzie perched on Pippy’s shoulder, the little girl joined her Nanny at the table. Maggie came down from the roof to join them, gobbling up a moth on the way then picking up a few spiders that had gotten trapped under the beams of Pergola. All the while, the magpie warbled and whistled incessantly, which amused the Monsters but made Byron shake his head.

Pippy laid Lizzie on the floor of Pergola, and let her crawl around, investigating this new part of Backyard.

“Oh, Maggie, it’s WONDERFUL!” shouted Lizzie.

“I told you so!” said Maggie, delighted that her friend had found something to be happy about at last. “There’s a pond behind you, just clear those galahs away.”

“Shut up, magpie!” screeched a pink and white galah that had been drinking from the pond.

Lizzie look up and hissed at the intruder.

“Ah, never mind him, Lizzie. He’s just a stupid galah!”

“Who are you callin’ stupid, Maggie?” laughed the galah. He turned to Lizzie. “Hi, I’m Louie,” he said. “I take it you’re the famous Lizzie?”

“Um, yeah, I’m Lizzie. The Monsters rescued me.”

“Well, that’s great!” said Louie. “They sorta rescued me. From hunger!” and he flew up to one of the feeders dangling from the beams above. “Ah, yum!” he exclaimed. “Fresh sunflower seeds, my favourite,” and Louis proceeded to eat too many seeds.

Soon they were joined by a pair of Rosellas, who ate an apple that the Monster called Nanny held in her hand.

Lizzie drank at the small pond, then looked around her. There were so many things to see and explore, but then she saw Pippy smiling down at her. Lizzie crawled over towards her, then raised

her head up. Pippy leaned down and picked her up, placing her back on her shoulder. This time, Lizzie relaxed and just enjoyed the ride. It was truly wonderful!

Attack of the Myna Birds

Every few days, Pippy came out of House and perched Lizzie on her shoulder for the trek to Pergola. Maggie was usually there to warble and yak, conversing with anyone and everything if they would listen. She really did have a wide range of voices, and it gave the Monsters hours of amusement just listening to her.

Under Pergola, they all chatted with each other, meeting new friends all the time. On this day, like many others, Pippy and Nanny were relaxing in the hammock, laughing at the antics of Maggie and Louis, who were exchanging insults and pecking at each other across the feeders. Even Byron came down to feed on the specially prepared mince that the Monsters brought with them. They were soon joined by a couple of sparrows, but not because they wanted to play or feed.

Oh no!

Something had frightened the little birds out of their wits!

"What's wrong?" asked Maggie.

The two sparrows started talking all at once, and neither Maggie nor Louis could understand a word.

"Hold it, hold it, one at a time!" yelled Louis.

"The Myna birds chased us!" said one.

"They got Sid, me bruvver!" said the other. "He was trying to fight them off! The last we saw, they were on Hills-Hoist!"

"Come on, Maggie! Byron!" yelled Louis, and the birds flew into the air. Sure enough, as they came up to the peak of Hills-Hoist, they saw three or four of the cowardly Myna birds swooping and pecking at two smaller sparrows.

"HAHA!" shouted one Myna. "Gotcha!"

"OW!" cried the sparrow. "That hurt!"

Suddenly, Maggie, Byron and Louis arrived at the scene. "It's a different story when there's three of us!" growled Maggie.

The Myna birds backed off, and Maggie said to the sparrows, "Which one of you is Sid?"

"That's me. I'm Sid."

"Are you hurt?"

"Nah, just a scratch, couple of feathers. I'll be alright." Sid turned to the other sparrow. "You OK, Nell?" he asked.

"I think so," gasped the little sparrow, obviously Sid's girlfriend.

"You and Nell fly over to Pergola," said Maggie. "Your brother's there. We'll look after these guys."

"Thanks, mate!" said Sid. "Much appreciated," and he and Nell flitted away to Pergola.

Maggie and Louis turned to the Myna birds who were re-grouping for an attack.

“Who’s first?” squawked Louis, staring into the flock of Mynas, raising all his white feathers up on his head, and stretching out his enormous wings. Maggie and Byron just stared at them with their fierce black eyes sparkling with menace!

“Um....” Gulped the biggest of the Mynas, as he figured he and his flock had maybe bitten off more than they could chew. “Ah, I think I hear my Mother calling,” and they all swooped away into the distance.

Maggie and Louis laughed all the way back to Pergola while Byron flew high into the sky to make sure the Myna birds were not doubling back for a sneak attack.

“What happened?” asked Lizzie, when they returned.

“Let’s say those Myna’s won’t be coming around here anymore,” said Maggie.

“Wow, that’s a relief!” said Sid’s brother, whose name was Mike. “You OK, bro?”

“Yeah, Mike. I couldn’t leave Nellie there. I had to....”

“I know, Sid. When I took off, I thought you were right behind me. When I realised that you’d stayed to protect Nellie, I was near Pergola and could hear Maggie and Louis!”

“It’s OK, Mike. Nell just froze in fear. Those Mynas took her sister’s eggs, trashed her nest and left her for dead. She’s terrified of them now!”

“That’s terrible!” exclaimed Lizzie.

“Yeah,” agreed Maggie, “you guys had better stay here with us. You all look like you could do with some seeds. And there’s plenty of fresh water here, too.”

Mike, Sid and Nellie flitted between the small pond and the bird feeder. Nellie dropped to the ground when she spotted some nice-looking crumbs at the feet of the Monsters. She kept glancing up at them, wary of their presence.

“Don’t worry, these Monsters are friendly,” said Maggie. “They’ll look after you. And there’s plenty of room for a new nest!”

As if to emphasise the point that these were friendly Monsters, they all watched as Pippy’s hands slid gently under Lizzie’s belly. Lizzie relaxed, and let the little girl place her high on her shoulder again.

“C’mon, Lizzie,” said Pippy, “I’m taking you back to Nanny’s Garden. It’s getting late.”

“Bye everyone!” cried Lizzie, from her grand perch. “See you all tomorrow!”

“Bye Lizzie,” cried all the creatures that had made Backyard their home.