

Nilly and Grey go Elephant Riding by Nizrana Farook



Nilly and Grey screeched and flew down from the jackfruit tree.

"Cheep!" said Nilly as she alighted on the grass. "I was first."

"No, it was me!" said Grey. "Cheep! Me first."

They giggled and flew back up the tree, launching themselves down once more. Their little three-toed feet thwacked softly on the springy ground. Further up at the watering hole, hundreds of buffalo milled about drinking their fill.

"Look!" Nilly tumbled upside down into a puddle close to them. "Let's go swimming."

Grey jumped in and splashed Nilly with his wings, instantly turning them dark and sodden.

Two of their friends flew by. "Cheep!" they said. "We're coming swimming too."

They crashed into the water and the four friends spent a few minutes of screaming, cheeping fun as they splashed in the puddle, getting wetter and wetter.

"Cheep!" Grey pointed. The elephants were coming to the watering hole. A great big herd of them, led by the matriarch Hāmine. "Elephants! Let's go riding."

Grey flew off towards the elephants, followed by his friends. Only Nilly flew up more slowly.

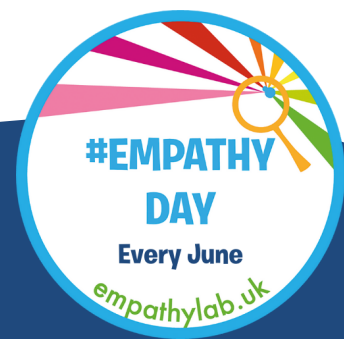
They alighted on the Mama Elephant Hāmine. As she walked the birds swayed this way and that. "Cheep!" they screamed in delight.

But not Nilly. She was looking decidedly green.

Hāmine walked on towards the water. The little birds gripped on tightly with their feet. They cheeped and cheeped as they swayed on her back.

Nilly rose into the air. "I have to go," she said in a small voice before flying back home.

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Grey went to find Nilly. “Why did you leave?”

She nestled towards her Mama. “I don’t like it. It makes me dizzy. And gives me a headache. Can’t we play other games?”

Grey groaned. “Cheep! You’re no fun.” And he flew away back to his friends. “Forget her. Let’s play on.”

They played all afternoon until the elephants went home.

They did the same the next day, and the next, having lots and lots of big elephant fun. But the sad look on Nilly’s face whenever Grey saw her gave him a funny feeling in his stomach.

“Cheep!” yelled Grey in pain. He’d snagged his wing on a branch.

“Cheep!” called Mama Bird. “How many times have I told you to be careful? No flying for a week until it heals.”

“Cheep!” said Grey to his little bird friends when they came over. “Let’s play other things until my wing heals.”

“But elephant riding is the best thing in the world!” said his friends.

“Cheep! That’s the only thing we want to play.”

“I can’t do it!” said Grey. “It would hurt me.”

“You’re no fun,” said his friends, and flew away to the elephants.

Grey looked sadly at them as they screamed in delight on Hāmine. They played there all afternoon until the elephants went home.

Grey saw Nilly lying back in the puddle, looking at the sky. She looked incredibly lonely.

And he knew how that felt.

He went over to the puddle. “Cheep! It’s fine to not be able to do the same things, or want to do the same things all the time. But I want to be your friend. It’s the best thing in the world.”

Nilly smiled. “Even better than riding an elephant?”

“Cheep!” said Grey as he jumped in the puddle with her.

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