

Bluebirds Can't Always Fly

My friends call me **Dreamer**. How'd I get that name, you ask?



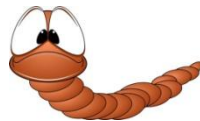
Well, that's part of the story I wish to share.

As a birdling I lived high above the ground, in a forest of sky-scraping giant redwoods, the tallest trees in the world.

My first memory is of my Dad dropping a big juicy bug into the nest for me to eat. But before I could scoop it up, it scuttled out of my reach and over the edge. Curious where it went, I leaned forward and peered down into an abyss and watched in fascination as the bug fell. It shrunk as it plunged, finally disappearing altogether. It was so neat. My



and pointed out other tiny shifting like grains of sand floor. Ground crawlers, Mom called them. She said they were humans but to me they were only bugs.



parents laughed specks, which were across the valley

Our forest was quiet, for bugs and insects found redwood sap poisonous. With no food around, most birds and animals lived

elsewhere. Not us though. Everyday my parents flew out beyond the great forest to hunt and every day I eagerly awaited their return.

Then one day, Dad went in search of food and never came home.

After that I had trouble sleeping. Almost every night Mom would wake to find me on some far off limb, staring up at the stars

in a trance, shaking from the cold. She called it dream-walking.

She would place me under her warm wing and sing a little song she

created just for me. Even now in my mind I can hear the echo of her voice singing *Starlight Lullaby*.



Starlight Lullaby (lyrics)

Starlight Lullaby (music)

Starlight Lullaby (song)



*Under Starry Nights
We Live Out Our Fantasies
Let Your Dreams Take Flight
You'll See How Sweet Life Can Be
Open Up Your Heart
And Give All Your Dreams To The World
Every Boy And Girl
Simple As A Thought
When Love Lights Up Your Heart*

*All Across The Land
We're Part Of A Bigger Plan
Lend A Helping Hand
And Make All Your Wishes Come True
Think What We Can Do
Look Into Your Heart
With All Your Hopes And All Your Dreams
Every Boy And Girl
Should Set To Sail Around The World
We All Have A Part
So Light A Candle In the Dark
And Find Your Dreams Inside
Under Starry Nights
We Live Out Our Fantasies
Let Your Dreams Take Flight
You'll See How Sweet Life Can Be
Open Up You Heart
And Give All Your Dreams To The World
Every Boy And Girl
All Around The World*



At the end of the song, she would nudge her head against mine, and whisper, "You're my little Dreamer." Then, we'd gaze up at the twinkling stars and each make a silent wish.



Afterwards, she carried me back to our nest and watched me fall asleep.

Some nights, haunted by nightmares, I chirped in my sleep until Mom would come and gently coo, "*Wake up Dreamer you're pillow-talking.*"

Summer passed and my friends learned to fly. Their dads taught them. Mom tried teaching me but she now had to hunt for

all our food, there just wasn't enough time.

Soon I was alone. My friends soaring amongst the trees while I watched safely from the branches.



Then, one morning Mom flew away and like Dad, she didn't return.

That night, I must have dream-walked, and not having my mother to wake me, I fell into the river and drifted on a log until a little golden bear named **Dancer** spotted me the next morning and swam out to save me.

I missed my parents.



As time passed I meet some of Dancer's friends. My favorite, **Red**, was a poison dart frog from the Amazon jungle, deadly to the touch. We played hide and seek in the fields of bright flowers outside Dancer's house, where winged butterflies floated on the breezes.



Often, while concealed in the tall grasses, I would race through the brush, wings flapping wildly, only to loose my

footing and crash hard to the ground. Self-conscious, I would sit dusty among the ground bugs and try not to cry. At other times, I'd watch the grasshoppers bound skyward, flicking their wings for a moment only to fall to the earth embarrassed, just like me. Flying seemed so puzzling.

At night, as the fireflies glittered in the darkness like sparks of dreams, I wished for my parents. Then as the air chilled, I'd press down into the fur-lined toes of my moccasin slipper bed and try to sleep.



Morning came all too early, "Cock-a-doodle-doo," said Dancer.

"You're not a rooster Dancer. Leave me alone."

But he ignored my grumbling and soon sunlight flooded into my birdhouse as Dancer popped open the roof. I yawned, covering my eyes.

"Too bright," I said, peeking up at my silly friend.

"Red says we're visiting the bird sanctuary today."

"What's a sanctuary?" I asked.

Dancer didn't answer right away but pitched me up to his shoulder and raced off to find Red. "My Mom says it's a safe home for birds."

My claws clutched at the fur around his neck. "Well take me to sanctuary cause I'm not safe up here."

Dancer stopped, his ears twitching. "Quit that, you're tickling me."

This was my chance; I grabbed both ears and Dancer went down. "Stop! Help!"

A squishing noise slapping up the trail meant Red was joining us.

"What's all the racket," said the red frog as he bounded onto a log just above Dancer's head.

"He's torturing me," said Dancer, as he rolled laughing through the tall grass. I leaped free just as Dancer slipped, splat, into the little stream feeding the pond. He scrambled back to land and began shaking water off his fur.

We all laughed. Red glanced at the sun through the trees and mumbled something about some early birds catching worms.

Dancer made a face, curling his gums over his teeth, "I don't like worms. Eck!"

"Well, you won't have to worry then," said Red, pretending to dangle a fat juicy worm in front of our faces. Dancer's stomach rumbled and we laughed again.

"I know you're hungry, Dancer," said Red. "If we hurry, we'll still find some nuts and berries along the trail before they're all eaten."

In one motion, Dancer snatched me up with his paw and scampered off down the trail, Red bounding at our feet.

We traveled for miles before the forest thinned and the wilderness ended in a path that led to the village. The village attracted everyone who lived in the valley, but was home to man and as such, a place to be wary of.

It was men who had captured Red and whom he had escaped into the forest from. They seemed dangerous. As we approached, we began to see people. They made me nervous, all so busy and loud. We tried to avoid them.



Nearby, a group of tourists talked about the bird sanctuary as an important-looking person in a brown uniform, a ranger, herded them in the direction of a great domed net.



We followed at a distance.

There it was looming high between two giant redwoods, like a spider's black web trapping everything below - the sanctuary. A terrible screeching grew as we approached. Frightened, I hid behind Dancer's big fluffy ears. We skirted the perimeter, keeping to the shadows, not wanting to be seen.

Inside the netting, a ranger approached several long silver trays where birds were sunning themselves. He grunted, gave the



tray a kick with his boot scattering about a dozen birds like dice across the ground. Then, he chuckled. The ranger emptied buckets of seeds into the trays as birds greedily swarmed to feed.

Round-bellied little fliers soon squabbled over the remains that had spilled onto the ground.

When nothing remained, one of the unlucky birds that had encountered the ranger's wrath hobbled over to check us out. "Get away while you can," he moaned.

I turned to my friends. "Can we help?"

"I think not," said Red, suspiciously following the ranger's movements. "There's only trouble here."

I began to feel apprehensive, a momentary breeze causing me to tremble. The netting formed a grid of shadows across everything inside. *This is no sanctuary, I thought. It's a prison.*

Twilight was coming. Slender streams of sunlight played and then disappeared in the branches as the sun began to set. Shadows began to fill the valley floor. With the trays now empty, the birds had disappeared into the cold-limbed trees for the night.

I barely noticed as Dancer lifted me clear of the ground and gave me a hug. I hung tightly to his neck and said, "Let's go home."

We nodded to each other in silence then moved off to join Red.

Then, I heard it, the faint sound of my mother's voice singing my song. "Stop, Dancer!"

I leaped off of Dancer's shoulder and darted back to the netting, searching the trees.



"Mom," I screamed. I waited, beating my wings against the netting, wanting to reach her.



I listened, waiting expectantly but there was only silence now. Tears came to my eyes. Had I imagined it?

My friends rushed over, "Dreamer, you flew!"

"Just a graceful fall," I attempted a smile, but the tears were hard to hold back.

I just imagined it, I thought.

Then, from high in the trees, Mom's voice called out as she swooped down to meet me, "Dreamer!"

We nudged each other through the netting. Another cry, and there was Dad. Unprepared, with legs quivering, I collapsed against the net.

When I recovered, my parents had already introduced themselves to my friends. They were describing how the rangers had captured them,



how escape was impossible for the rangers where just too powerful.

"Nothing's impossible," I cried, pecking at the tangle of netting that separated us.

Unexpectedly, Red spoke, "That's it! We must open both the doors at each end of the tunnel." Red pointed to a sign next to the entrance. It read, *No birds permitted in tunnel while outer door is open.*

I turned to Red, "Let's break in."

"Not so simple," said Red, "From here we can't see it, but I'll bet my webbed toes that there is another button inside that opens the inner door."

Red hopped onto a large boulder, unnoticed. His fingers resting over the edge, he sat motionless, his eyes narrow slits shifting back and forth observing the entrance. You could tell he was in deep thought.

I looked up at the button next to the entrance and wondered how we would reach it, only a ranger was that tall.

Finally, Red waved us over, "This is going to be quite a trick, so pay close attention."

We huddled and listened, conspirators in a secret plan.

Red paced recklessly about on his rock. Somewhere he had picked up a thick stick that he waved excitedly, in jerky exaggerated sweeping motions, like a general commanding his

troops, "When the ranger first opens the outer door we must lure him away long enough for the rescue." He juttred the stick at Dancer, who stepped back, surprised. "Dancer, you must cause enough chaos to draw the ranger out." Dancer scratched his head, looking over at the tourists, then back at the ranger. What was Dancer thinking?

As Red's attention shifted to me, I gulped as if choking on a big bug, "Dreamer, you only have to fly into the tunnel, press the inside door-release that will free your parents and fly out. But if you don't escape before the ranger returns...", Red, didn't finish.

Only, I thought, feeling sick. I couldn't reach that button. I lowered my head and wobbled over to my parents.

My voice trembled, "I can't fly."

Dad looked down on me for a moment then smiled. "Nothing's impossible, Dreamer. It's time that you learned."

I stood there shaking my head, my stomach churning, but I watched as he extended his wings, fanned the air beneath him, and lifted off. It appeared so easy.

"Now, like a butterfly, lift your wings," said Dad.

I flapped my wings. I felt clumsy; the dust I raised swirled about, causing me to sneeze. I stopped flapping. Nothing!

Dad spoke, "Relax Dreamer, you're trying too hard."

I closed my eyes and remembered the butterflies in the fields and pressed my wings down hard against the air. Suddenly my feet left the ground. "I can fly!" I hovered for a moment, feeling the wind rush through my feathers, and then stepped back to earth.

Just then a ranger started to enter the sanctuary.

"Watch," said Red, motioning to us. "See how he pushes the button." He poked Dancer with his stick, "Now Dancer - go fast."

With this, Dancer scooted off toward a crowd of people that were standing about twenty feet away, growling for everything he was worth, and plowed into them. People went flying.

"Mad bear!" a tourist screamed. Then everybody started yelling. The ranger came running out of the tunnel, slamming the door. He didn't notice the red frog just outside that had stepped in and jammed a stick in place to stop the door from closing.

"Now, Dreamer," croaked Red.

Frightened I beat at the air, flittering just inches off the ground. Out of control, I careened down the tunnel. Confused, I stopped, at the far end, confused, but then I spotted it. I took to flight.

"Thud," off the mark.

I dropped to the ground, dazed and immediately lifted off again.

"Thunk," a little closer, my head spinning like a swirling cloud of dust. Time was running out. I gathered myself, took a deep breath and soared skyward. I arched high and came in level with the button. I nailed it. An alarm sounded as the door opened. Mom and Dad swooped out and we hugged. A few moments later, a hundred other birds hopped over and joined us.

We froze as a shout called out from down the tunnel. Towering above us, a ranger blocked our escape. He reached to close the outer door, but Red struck first at the man's open-sandaled feet. The ranger screamed as he dropped, electrifying us into action. Up we soared like fighter jets, past his outstretched hands to freedom.

We raced, flew, and hopped away, back into the shelter of the forest, back toward home, away from man.

My wish had finally come true.

