

Welcome Home



by Mukseet Bashir illustrations by Ali Teo

Published 2021 by the Ministry of Education,
PO Box 1666, Wellington 6140, New Zealand.
education.govt.nz

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Enquiries should be made to the publisher.
Publishing services: Lift Education E Tū

Editors: Susan Paris and David Chadwick
Designer: Simon Waterfield

ISBN 978 1 77690 039 8 (print)
ISBN 978 1 77690 044 2 (online)

Replacement copies may be ordered from
Ministry of Education Customer Services,
online at www.thechair.co.nz
by email: orders@thechair.minedu.govt.nz
or freephone 0800 660 662

Please quote item number 90039.

An online version of this book and audio for the text can be found at
<https://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/A-Matou-Korero-Our-Stories>



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New Zealand Government

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Syed the sandgrouse was eating lentil seeds when the storm arrived. Rain began to fall, and the wind started to blow. Soon it was howling like a wolf.

Syed tried to shelter behind some rocks, but the wind was too strong. It picked him up and carried him high into the air.





Up, up he went, deep into the clouds. Lightning flashed and thunder boomed all around. Syed was tossed and turned this way and that until he had no idea where he was or where he was going.

After many hours, the wind stopped, and Syed came out of the clouds. He was over the ocean.



He headed towards a small, rocky island. As he was about to land, two huge birds flew up behind him. “Hey, you’re not a toroa,” they screeched. “Get out of here. This place is ours!”

Syed was terrified. The big birds swooped and dived and chased him away.






Although Syed was exhausted, he kept flying. Just when he thought he couldn't go any further, he saw a beach ahead. He landed on the sandy shore.

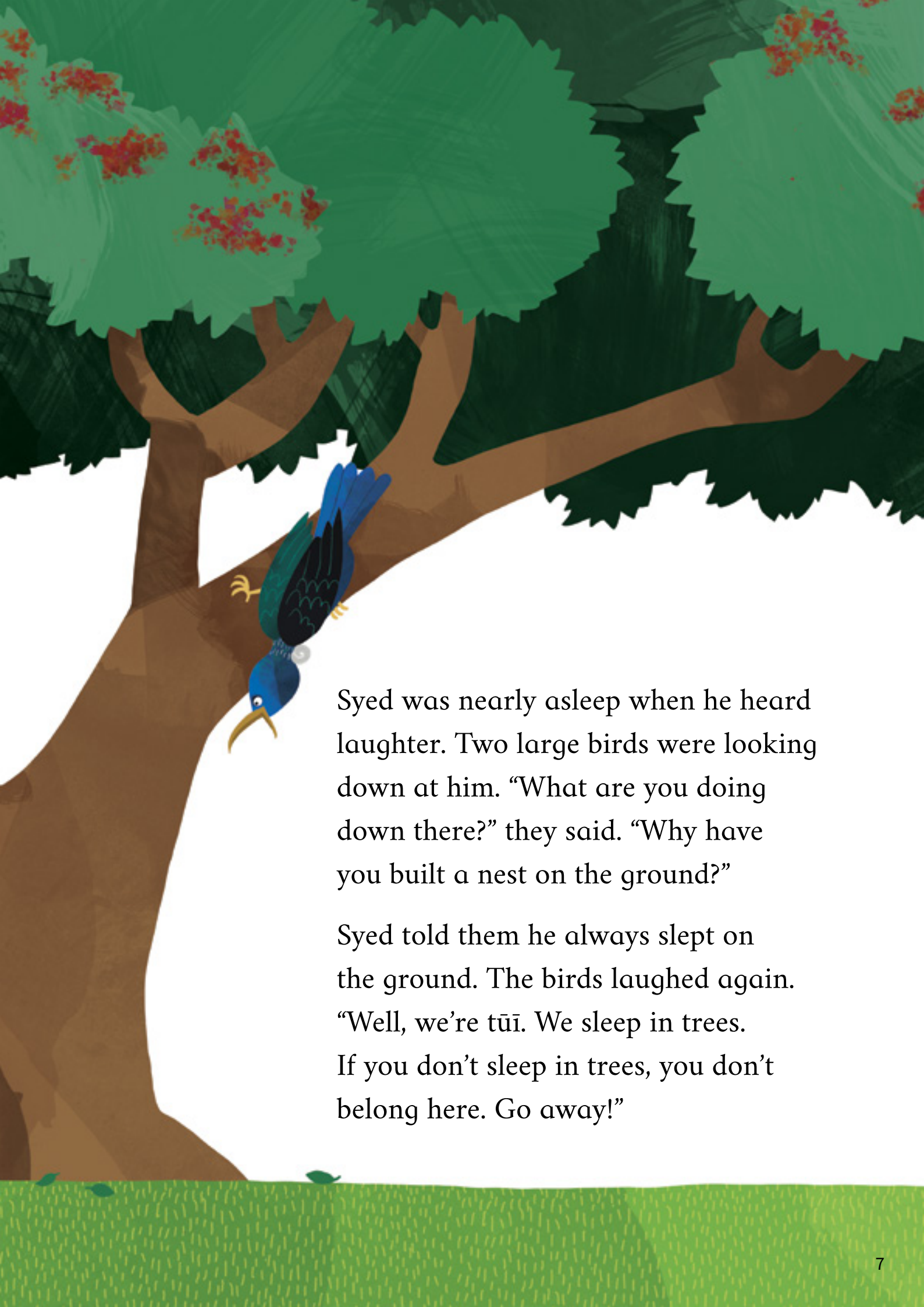
A group of birds were standing nearby. "Hello," Syed said. "Where am I? I'm lost."

"This is our beach," squawked the birds. "It's for seagulls only. You're not welcome. Go away!"



Once again, Syed flew on.
His wings ached, and he was
very, very hungry. At last, he saw
a park. Under a tree in the park,
he found some seeds. They weren't
lentil seeds, but he was so hungry,
he ate them anyway. Then he made
a nest under the trees and sat down
to rest.





Syed was nearly asleep when he heard laughter. Two large birds were looking down at him. “What are you doing down there?” they said. “Why have you built a nest on the ground?”


Syed told them he always slept on the ground. The birds laughed again. “Well, we’re tūi. We sleep in trees. If you don’t sleep in trees, you don’t belong here. Go away!”

Syed flew on and landed next to some buildings beside a river. He was so tired, he quickly fell asleep.



When he woke up, two small birds were standing nearby. “Hello,” said one. “Who are you?” Syed explained who he was and what had happened.





“Well, you can come along with us if you like. I’m Sam the sparrow, and that’s Petra the pīwakawaka.” Syed felt happier at once. These two birds seemed friendly.

But his happiness didn’t last long. Sam and Petra were small, and they moved very quickly. Syed couldn’t keep up. Soon, they grew tired of waiting and sped off. Syed was left behind.



Syed felt very, very lonely. “Why are the birds in this strange new land so unkind?” he thought. “Why don’t they like me?”

That night, Syed was unable to sleep. He kept thinking about the desert and lentil seeds. He missed his home so badly it was like an ache. He stared sadly into the darkness.





Then he saw that two huge yellow eyes were staring back. “Kia ora,” hooted the visitor. “I’m Rima the ruru. Who are you?”

Syed introduced himself. He told Rima about the storm and the other birds and the way they had treated him. “Don’t worry about those other birds,” said Rima. “I’ll introduce you to some of my friends. You’ll like them. Come with me.”





They flew and flew until the sun began to rise. Finally, they landed in a big tawa tree in the bush. Syed had never seen anywhere so green before. It was beautiful! All around them, he could hear the other birds waking up.

“Everyone, come and meet Syed,” said Rima.

“He’s new to Aotearoa.”

Rima’s friends gathered around Syed. There was Billy the blackbird, Kiri the kererū, Kahu the kiwi, and Kate the kākāpō.




“There’s someone else I want you to meet,” said Rima.

“Her name is Nazneen. She also came here from far away.”



Nazneen was a namaqua dove.
“I was caught in a storm, too,”
she said. “I’m from Madagascar.
We’re all different around here.
Billy is from Australia. Kiri is
the biggest pigeon you’ll ever
meet. Kahu is a fast runner but
he can’t fly. I like lentil seeds.
And Kate likes to sleep on the
ground, just like you.”





“We’ll be your friends, Syed,”
said Rima. “Nazneen can show
you where to find the food
you like, Kate can help you to
build a nest, and I can keep you
company when you can’t sleep.
It will take time, but soon you’ll
feel right at home!”



For the first time since the storm, Syed felt safe. Now he had friends who understood that being different wasn't a bad thing. He knew, with their help, he could soon call this strange and beautiful land home.



