



The C.K. Thompson Collection

# WILLY WAGTAIL

*by*

**C.K. THOMPSON**



# WILLY WAGTAIL

By C.K. Thompson, R.A.O.U., J.P.

(Member of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union)

# CONTENTS

1.	Willy Wagtail	3
2.	Nesting Time	9
3.	Willy Meets a Cat	15
4.	Jimmy Meets Nemesis	26
5.	Old Jack Kookaburra	38
6.	Bush Justice	51
7.	Swamp Adventure	61
8.	Willy's Busy Day	79
9.	Uncle Jim	88

## DEDICATION

*To my good friend and fellow Honorary Magistrate, Mrs. ANNE J. TICKLE, J.P., of Waratah, N.S.W. in appreciation of her interest in the preservation of Australian wild life, and of her valuable assistance to me in the compilation of the Monthly News Bulletin of the Northern N.S.W. Federation of Justices of the Peace—an organisation of which I am the Founder, and of which I have had the honour to be President since its foundation.*

## FOREWORD

In most of the stories I have written about our Australian birds and animals, that friendly little chap, the black and white fantail, known affectionately to all of us as Willy Wagtail, has been one of the leading characters. I have found it almost impossible to write a book about our birds and fail to mention Willy. It was only natural, therefore, that, in due course, I should give him the title role in a story.

But this particular book was not intended to do that. Following a discussion with my publishers, it was agreed that I should write a book starring the Kookaburra, and when I started work, Old Jack did, in fact, have the centre of the stage. I had not proceeded far, however, before Willy Wagtail, the Bush Busybody, thrust his beak in, and eventually took over the leading role. The result was that I had to re-arrange the whole cast, and relegate Old Jack to second lead. I'll make it up to him some other time.

Regarding the descriptions of nest-stealing mentioned in this book, this habit among birds is world-wide. Experienced ornithologists have established that at least eighty different kinds of Australian birds appropriate the nests of other species. Most of them do so when the real owners have no further use for them; but there have been cases of forcible dispossession. Even Willy Wagtail has been guilty of it. He is reported to have used the open mud nest of a Welcome Swallow, and even that of his best friend, the Peewit or Mudlark. The latter's nest seems to be a great favourite among birds. As famous Australian ornithologist, Alec H. Chisholm, has written: "You can never be quite sure what kind of a bird you will see peering over the rim of a 'peewee's' old nest."

One last word about Willy. Is there an Australian who does not know the ubiquitous wagtail? Go where you will—in city park or garden, in suburban backyard, in the heart of the lonely bush—and there he is, the friend of all and the enemy of none. For Willy Wagtail is one of the most beloved and undoubtedly the most companionable little bird of all our interesting and unique wild life.

C. K. THOMPSON.



## CHAPTER ONE

### NESTING TIME

THE first touch of spring was upon the bushlands. In the early mornings the air was still tinged with the breath of Jack Frost, and after the sun went down the grey mists crept along the mountain gorges, arising from the placid creeks and waterholes. But as each day gave way to another, so did each grow longer and warmer.

In common with most other birds of their acquaintance, both friends and foes, Willy Wagtail and his mate were occupied in the very serious business of nest-building. Both were accomplished home architects, and the work was proceeding apace according to plans and specifications. They had selected the branch of a weeping willow tree that jutted out from the parent trunk above the waters of a deep, picturesque creek. It was an ideal nesting place, because the thick, graceful willow trailers provided an effective screen, behind which the little black-and-white birds had very good prospects of completing their home and rearing their chicks unmolested.

Willy and his mate had used various willow and gum trees along this creek for several seasons, and had raised quite a number of families. There had been losses, of course. On one occasion a heavy storm with gale-force winds had

emptied the nest of three youngsters. The nest itself was too well constructed and too well attached to the limb to suffer damage. A second clutch of eggs had hatched and Willy and his mate had, in due season, launched a family into the world. There was one occasion when two eggs out of three were taken from the nest by a thieving small boy. The other had hatched out, but the nestling had provided a meal for a roving kookaburra.

But these were the ordinary ups and downs in the life of any bird, and Willy took them philosophically. Not that he could do much else; but he and his mate, during their short lives, had contributed, in no small measure, to the wagtail population of their particular district.

Taking all in all and this with that, their nesting area was a desirable locality in which food was always plentiful, and the existence of a farmhouse not far away provided the little birds with all the animal and human companionship they desired. Both were on very familiar terms with the farmer's horses and cows and had more than a nodding acquaintance with Farmer Campbell's family—especially his young son, Jimmy, who was a lad for whom they had very little use.

When completed, the wagtail's nest would be a thing of sheer beauty. Willy and his mate were natural architects, and knew how to construct their neat, cup-shaped home of strips of bark bound together with spider webs and held firmly in place on the horizontal branch with the same adhesive material. The bark could be had from any convenient tree, while the spiders that inhabited the barns and outhouses at the Campbell farm contributed lavishly of their webs. They did not do so voluntarily. Willy just took what he wanted without bothering about what the spiders thought of it. He was not interested in the spiders as food; he preferred flies and other small insects that he either snatched out of



the air or trapped on leaves or on the ground.

But if Willy was not interested in spiders as food, his great friends and cronies the peewits or mudlarks were, and on several occasions that Willy went after webs, one or both of the peewits accompanied him—just for the meal.

Peewit and his mate had their nest in the same willow tree as Willy's, but on a higher limb. The four birds, similar in colouring, but so different in size, looks, habits and temperament, got along together in perfect harmony, and had often presented a united front to hawks, butcher birds, kookaburras and other nest robbers, including small boys. The four of them together made a very good fighting machine, while their united voices, loud and harsh, created a din enough to scare off many of their enemies, especially if those enemies had delicate eardrums.

Willy was only a little bird, but he had a complex nature. Not knowing the meaning of the word "timid," he was a very friendly little soul, ready to be matey with everyone. This, of course, did not include such deadly creatures as butcher birds, hawks and the like, cats—either native or tame—and the other predatory slayers who yearned to make a meal out of him and his family. Naturally he did not seek their friendship. All he wanted from them was to be left alone to live his own life in his own way.

One particular friend of Willy's was a large and placid old cow who provided the Campbell family with milk. Willy often used her as a convenient perch, riding on her broad back and employing her as a kind of bovine aircraft-carrier. She was generally surrounded by a halo of flies, and it was Willy's little habit to launch himself from her back among these flies, snap them up and return to the bovine flight-deck to consume his meal. The old cow also was an unconscious contributor to the lining of Willy's nest. His nestlings felt

cosy and warm in their bed of soft cowhair.

As to the complexity of his nature—friendly and tame he was where domestic cattle and human beings were concerned; friendly he was where most other birds were concerned; but, being absolutely fearless, he often made a complete pest of himself, interfering in the private affairs of his feathered colleagues and frequently earning for himself a hiding that he did not always get. He was small, but he was swift, and so adept in aerial manoeuvring that there were few birds who could catch him. He was cunning enough never to get in the way of the arrow-swift falcons or the murderous butcher birds, but he was not averse at times to having a tilt at Old Jack Kookaburra. Old Jack was tough and hard and a killer too; but he was not much of a flier, a fact of which Willy took full advantage.

Unquestionably one of the greatest gossips in the bush, putting even those chatterers, the noisy miners or soldier birds, to shame on occasion, Willy was happy as long as he knew what was going on around the place. His mate was similarly inclined, but she hardly got a chirp in edgeways when Willy had the floor—or branch.

With nest-building in full swing, however, Willy did not have much leisure to loaf around the bush making a nuisance of himself with his inquisitive ways. One cannot mind other birds' business and carry out one's own efficiently at the same time.

As Willy got on with the nest-building job, he suddenly became conscious of the fact that things were not quite as they should be. Something seemed to be missing. There appeared to be a gap in the chain of events. The more he thought of it, the more he became concerned. Something, apparently, was going on somewhere and he was being kept out of it. This was an intolerable thought, so he decided to

knock off work and try to find out what was what.

Perched on the branch at the side of the nearly-completed nest, Willy dabbed a piece of spider web into place with his small beak, and then took stock of his surroundings. First of all, the creek. Nothing out of the ordinary there—at least, it looked the same as usual. The willow tree was the same old tree he had known for years. The blue sky above was clear of feathered enemies and there were none that he could see in the tree itself, or on the banks, or on the surface of the water. A couple of redbills or waterhens were swimming near the reedy margin of the creek, but they were minding their own business. An open structure of rushes, leaves and grass placed on a platform of broken-down reeds showed that they were doing what Willy should have been doing—nest-erecting.

A sudden burst of “twitchee-twitchee-twitchee, quarty-quarty-quarty” from the thickets told Willy that a reed warbler was in residence. Willy saw these birds only in the nesting season. They spent the winter in the warmer regions far to the north, arriving at the creek around about August, and leaving again about March. A pair of spotted pardalotes or diamond birds were excavating a tunnel in the bank for their nest some distance down the creek, but they had been at that for some days now, as Willy knew. He missed nothing.

No, as far as he could see, all was as it should be around the creek.

In sudden decision, the little black-and-white bird took off and, looping upwards, landed on the branch that bore the peewits' nest. Peewit was engaged in poking bits of mud into position, but took time off to give Willy a brief, welcoming look. Then, having used his efficient beak as a trowel to slap the mud into a better shape, he fluffed out

his feathers and gave a flat chirp. Willy replied with a loud “sweet pretty creature” which nearly shattered the peewit’s eardrums. Giving Willy a reproachful look, the larger black-and-white bird flew down to the water’s edge where its mate was poking around among the aquatic plants in search of her favourite food, pond snails. She seemed a little abashed by the arrival of her mate, for she immediately grabbed a beakful of mud and headed for the nest. Peewit did the same.

Willy was still on the branch near the large pudding basin-shaped mud nest, swinging his huge tail from side to side. He was more than a little taken aback when the female peewit greeted him with a stream of shocking language, which to his not very sensitive ear sounded something like this: “Listen to me, Willy Wagtail, if you have no work to do, you inquisitive little wretch, don’t hold up birds who have. I saw you gabbing with that lazy mate of mine just now. Get back to your own limb and help your poor, over-worked hen. The trouble with you is, you talk too much and loaf too much, you little pest.”

Of course, the peewit might not have meant that at all in her flat chatter, but it evidently aroused whatever Willy called his conscience, because he nose-dived straight down to his own limb, the nagging voice of Mrs. Peewit following him. And as he landed near his half-built nest, he knew what had been worrying him. His “poor, over-worked hen” indeed! Why, he hadn’t seen the bird for hours! He had been fetching and carrying and doing all the work himself; that is, what work had been done, which was precious little.

With a chatter of anger, Willy darted into the air, half-looped and then shot off towards the farmhouse. It was there that he last remembered seeing her. They had both been collecting spider webs at the time. He had returned to the nest with a consignment, leaving her to follow. She hadn’t.

## CHAPTER TWO

### WILLY MEETS A CAT

THE Campbell farm was mainly agricultural, with lucerne flats along the creek bank, and all types of vegetables in their season. The farmer owned a couple of cows, several plough and dray horses, a sty full of pigs, two dogs, a ginger cat and a number of fowls. He also possessed a wife, a pair of farm hands and a 12-years-old son, Jimmy. The farmhouse was large and rambling, with the usual collection of hay sheds, cowbails and assorted barns. It was around these outhouses that Willy and his mate collected the spider webs they used to bind their nest together.

When Willy reached the farm he alighted on a twig in a scraggy old peach tree. As the farmer never troubled to prune this tree, it was not a good bearer of fruit, the few that it did bring forth being shared by Jimmy and a host of codlin moth grubs. The tree was large and wild, but not too large or too wild to prevent Willy inspecting it within a minute or two. There was no sign of his missing mate. "Sweet pretty creature," said Willy, to nobody in particular.

"Sweet pretty creature," came an answering bird voice from the direction of the farmhouse. Willy swivelled around. It wasn't his mate's voice—in fact it did not sound much like

a wagtail's call. Perched on top of the chimney was a biggish bird with glossy black plumage which had a metallic sheen. Its bill was pointed at the sky, and it was uttering wagtail calls, interspersed with sparrow chirps and silver-eye warbles.

Willy turned his back on the starling and its mimicking. He had little regard for imported pests, and starlings, though they were handsome enough in their way, were not native Australians. They were great destroyers of fruit and crops, even though they did eat a lot of harmful insects. They were very good mimics, as Willy knew, being able to imitate many different bird calls. Willy regarded this as sheer impertinence on the part of a bird whose ancestors came from Europe.

He swayed on the peach tree twig for a time while he surveyed the backyard of the farm. A few fowls were scratching fussily near the back door, watched sleepily by a large ginger cat lying on a bag on the doorstep. Willy knew this cat and it knew Willy. Neither had any love for each other. The wagtail had often flirted with sudden death by swooping down over the cat's back, chattering derisively as the animal made ineffectual swipes at it with its paws. Ginger did not like being made fun of, and if ever the cheeky Willy miscalculated a swoop, or relaxed his vigilance for one moment while on the ground, there would be a permanent merger of colours and black and white would be absorbed into ginger for evermore.

Ginger did not know that Willy was in the peach tree until the wagtail cut loose with a noise like peas rattling in a tin, followed immediately by his softer "sweet pretty creature." The sleepiness left Ginger's eyes and he flattened himself on the bag. Willy was sending out messages to his mate and did not notice the cat as it crept on its belly towards the tree. Reaching the bottom of the trunk, it gazed upwards

with greedy, baleful eyes, and stretched out its front paws, getting a firm grip on the trunk with its claws.

But as it tensed itself for a spring that would send it some feet up the tree, Willy saw it. Swaying his big tail from side to side, he looked Ginger over appraisingly and then remarked, "Did-ja-did-jadid!" Ginger flattened back his ears at the harsh call, but did not move an inch. There was a branch only a few feet above him. Willy was six feet up past that and now that the element of surprise had gone, Ginger knew that he had no chance at all of catching the bird. Willy knew it, too, and his sweet pretty creature to the cat was arrogantly impudent.

With a deep, throaty growl, the cat sprang upwards, reaching the lower limb, his tail waving slowly. He glared at Willy, his teeth bared in a wicked snarl, while low rumblings in his throat indicated how dearly he would like to make a meal of the little bush nuisance, who had not shifted.

Willy hopped off his twig on to the parent limb, glanced downwards at Ginger six feet below, and then, catching sight of a passing insect, darted swiftly outwards, caught it and returned to his perch. Ginger, crouched on the limb below, would have to swarm several feet up the tree trunk to get at Willy, and Willy had no intention of allowing him to do that. But as long as it was safe to tantalise his feline enemy, he would do so.

Once again he directed a stream of uncomplimentary chatter at the cat and then, as if that were not enough, he suddenly made a dive at it, his little beak snapping within inches of the cat's head. Ginger, who had not expected that manoeuvre, was too late to do anything before Willy had returned to his former vantage point, but the sheer impudence of it stung him into movement. With a snarl, he ran up the tree trunk and reached the limb on which Willy

was perched. Unconcernedly, the wagtail hopped up still higher, this time selecting a twig which would just bear his weight, but would certainly not hold that of a small kitten, let alone a full-grown cat.

Then Willy became positively overbearing. He chattered and he chirped, he dived into the air, looped the loop, flew backwards and forwards across the yard, made several circuits of the peach tree, took feinting dives towards Ginger and then returned to the twig again, swaying his huge tail from side to side so violently that it was a wonder he did not overbalance.

Crouched on the limb, Ginger glared at Willy with hate-filled eyes. The wagtail was only about a foot above him, but eight feet away. Ginger was near the trunk of the tree, while Willy was among the outermost leaves. He unconcernedly, and unnecessarily, preened one of his wings for a few seconds and then hopped down on to the limb on which Ginger crouched with hungry eyes and bristling whiskers.

The tomcat tensed for a spring, and Willy watched him warily. He then imitated half a box of matches being rattled—a vocal noise that irritated the cat beyond restraint. It sprang, but Willy was no longer on the limb. He was darting to and fro some feet above it like an intoxicated jet plane pilot.

Ginger squatted there and glared at him. The wagtail returned to the twig he previously had occupied and settled down to a thorough preening, keeping one eye on the movements of the enemy below. He broke off his toilet at one stage to advise Ginger that he was a “sweet pretty creature,” an insincere compliment that the cat received in malevolent silence.

But somebody else did not receive it in silence. Mrs. Willy Wagtail, having returned to the nest in the willow and having found her mate missing, decided to look for



him. She had not been loafing as Willy had thought. She had been on a hunt for material to line the nest away from the farmhouse; and that was why Willy had not found her there. Her arrival at the farm had coincided with her impudent mate's cynical compliment to Ginger.

Swooping down over the yard, she alighted on a clothesline and swayed there for a few moments while she searched the yard to locate Willy. That little pest, who had not seen her arrive, was still fooling around on his twig and tantalising the tomcat. But when he gave a sudden vocal exhibition of scissors-grinding like his cousin the restless flycatcher, Mrs. Willy pin-pointed him and flitted across to the peach tree.

It was sheer misfortune for the little bird that she was completely in ignorance of what had been going on in that peach tree. Had she announced her arrival by chirping or something, Willy could have given her warning. But she had not announced it.

From the clothesline she went darting down into the peach tree, alighting only a foot away from where the ginger cat crouched motionless. Ginger saw her and had her pinned down with a wicked, flashing paw before she had time to think.

But before the cat had time to act further, Willy was at him like a miniature fury. The gallant little bird, all his impudence and flirting forgotten, dived straight from his twig at the cat, his little beak snapping. He hurled himself between Ginger's eyes, the effect of the peck being equivalent to a match jabbed at a concrete wall. Whirling away and chattering harshly, he again flung himself at the cat, who lifted a paw to strike at him. Unfortunately for Mrs. Willy, it was not the paw that pinned her to the branch.

Without giving Ginger time to think, Willy flew at him again and again, pecking his head, his sides—in fact any

part that presented itself. And as he did so his loud “did-ja-did-ja-did” rent the air. The row he kicked up attracted the attention of birds from far and near. His old friends the peewits, who had been eating grubs around the ploughed paddock, came flapping up together and added their grating cries to the general din. They flew in and out of the peach tree, while a flock of twittering sparrows, all sworn enemies of the ginger cat, strung themselves along the clothesline and chirped as loudly as they could. They did not go to Willy’s assistance, but they urged him on vocally. So did a pair of Indian turtle doves who were nesting in the guttering of the Campbell farmhouse.

Like the sparrows and the starlings, they were, in Willy’s opinion, foreign trash; but they were striking looking birds, those doves, with their grey heads, brown backs and wings, black necks with white spots, blackish tail feathers with white tips and cinnamon under-bodies. They threw a few sticks together in the guttering, called it a nest, laid two big white eggs and reared their pugnacious youngsters in poverty-stricken conditions. Argumentative also, replying to bird greetings with a call that sounded like a muttered “Is that so, huh?”

What with Willy Wagtail chattering, peewits squawking, sparrows chirping, doves cooing and hooting, roosters crowing and Ginger snarling, the combined uproar resembling a bush shire-council meeting, the peace of the farmyard was completely shattered. Open flew the back door, and out rushed young Jimmy Campbell.

“What’s going on here?” he roared to the world in general.

Nobody had time to answer him. He saw the wild flutterings around the peach tree and ran to it, the better to investigate; and at that precise moment, one of the peewits and Willy himself hit Ginger at the same time. The peewit

gave the cat a sharp peck on the head, while the wagtail got home a shrewd, painful peck right in the eye. It was too much for Ginger. He made a vicious slash with one paw and then with the other—and the captive hen wagtail fell to the ground at Jimmy Campbell's feet. She staggered upright, only to fall over again. Jimmy looked up in astonishment and then dropped his eyes to the wagtail moving feebly in the dust. He stooped and picked her up, just beating Ginger, who had come scurrying down the tree trunk, harried by Willy and the peewits, to try to retrieve his prize.

"I thought you wouldn't be far away," said Jimmy to Ginger. "So you had this waggie, did you? Well, get on your way, sailor, you're not having it for dinner this trip."

Saying which, the boy gave the cat a heavy kick in the ribs. Ginger spat in disgust and raced around the side of the house, while Willy and the peewits took refuge on the top of a shed, still voicing their opinions of cats. The sparrows had dispersed at the first appearance of Jimmy, but the doves still perched on the guttering, hooting and cooing.

"You look a bit used up," Jimmy remarked to Mrs. Willy, who lay in the palm of his hand, moving feebly. "But you ain't dead, anyway. I'll shove you in a box until you recover and then you can push off. Let Ginger clean up the useless sparrows if he wants a bird feed."

"Zat so, huh?" cooed a dove from the roof.

"Yep, that's so," retorted Jimmy. "And I'll be up there soon cleaning that nest of yours out of the guttering. Every time it rains the gutter flows over with the muck you've shoved in it."

Jimmy Campbell unearthed a rusty old canary cage and gently placed Mrs. Willy on the floor in it. Then he hung the cage on a nail at the side of the fowlhouse, high enough to prevent Ginger getting at it. That done, he stood and

watched for a while. Mrs. Willy, apart from the loss of a few feathers, had not been hurt bodily, but she had suffered a big shock as well as having had the wind knocked out of her by the tomcat's ungentle paw. Ginger had had no time to get her into his mouth, otherwise the story would have had a different ending.

A rasping noise from directly above him drew Jimmy's eyes upwards. On the edge of the fowlhouse roof sat Willy Wagtail, swaying gently backwards and forwards and peering down anxiously.

"Ah, there, old timer," greeted Jimmy. "Is this a pal of yours in this cage? Your missus, maybe, huh?"

"Sweet pretty creature," said Willy.

"Every time I see myself in the mirror I say that, Willy," chuckled Jimmy. "However, I suppose you want to talk it over with the old girl, no? Maybe I'd better leave the cage door open so that you can visit the hospital ward and give her a bunch of flowers, huh?"

"Did-ja-did-ja-did!" grated Willy.

"Don't hurry me, I'll fix it," said the boy. Searching around, he found a bit of string and with this he secured the cage door so that it would remain open. Then he waved his hand to Willy and retired to the peach tree, against which he leaned his back, the better to watch developments.

Willy stayed on the edge of the fowlhouse roof for some minutes, swaying his big tail to and fro and keeping a wary eye on Jimmy. He neither liked nor trusted the boy and momentarily expected him to start something detrimental to his wagtail welfare. The peach tree was fifty feet or so away from the fowlhouse.

Willy, though bold and impudent, could also be very cautious. He sensed some kind of a trap here. Although his small mate was only a few feet below him, she was sur-

rounded by something that was as unattractive as it could be menacing.

It was a feeble chirping noise from the cage that made him move. The little hen bird was crouched in a corner, unhurt, but not feeling the best. Willy left the fowlhouse roof and darted backwards and forwards in front of the cage several times, chirping in a low tone. His mate replied weakly. Willy then made a complete circuit of the yard, closely examining it and pin-pointing each living object. There was no sign of the cat, the fowls were going about their ordinary business, the sparrows were scuffling in the dust, and the doves, the starling and his friends the peewits had vanished. Only Jimmy Campbell remained, leaning against the peach tree like a toppling statue.

Reassured, Willy decided to take a chance. He darted straight at the cage and perched on top of it. Peering through the rusty wires, he chattered to his mate inside. She made a feeble leap from the floor to the single perch, wobbled unsteadily and fell off. Willy left the cage roof, half-looped and then clung to the front wires. Cocking his head around the open door, he chirped "sweet pretty creature." Mrs. Willy looked at him droopy-eyed, opened and closed her beak a few times as if she were very bored, but said nothing. Willy hopped through the open doorway and joined her, nuzzling her with his small beak. She returned the endearment.

"Why don't you kiss her?" shouted Jimmy Campbell from the peach tree. Startled, Willy shot through the doorway, looped upwards and came to rest again on top of the fowlhouse. Surprised at his sudden departure, Mrs. Willy hopped to the doorway and looked out. Harshly, Willy told her to join him, but she merely sat there. Impatiently, Willy again dived down and clung to the side wires near the door. His "sweet pretty creature" was an urgent plea

for her to stir herself and let them both get away from this place. Willy didn't like it. He sensed danger. As long as he was in the region of that cat and that boy, he was uneasy.

Several times he flew from the cage to the fowlhouse and back again, sometimes perching on the cage top, sometimes clinging to the side or front wires, but never entering the cage itself. Occasionally he varied the performance by looping the loop, but he could not make his mate leave the cage. The fact was, Mrs. Willy had not quite recovered from her shock, but was regaining strength steadily.

It was when Willy became really angry in his anxiety, and threatened to attack his mate, that Jimmy Campbell interfered. He walked towards the cage, clapping his hands in an endeavour to scare Mrs. Willy into the open. Willy saw him coming and his rage towards his mate turned towards this human intruder. Boldly he made a dive at Jimmy, his little beak snapping over the boy's head. Jimmy made an involuntary smack at Willy but missed him. Mrs. Willy became excited and while Willy was dive-bombing Jimmy, she took her courage in both wings, left the cage doorway, and managed to wobble her way up to the fowlhouse roof. Willy saw her, screeched his delight, and flew swiftly to her side.

Several times he took to the air and flitted off, only to return to urge her to follow him. And at last she did. She took to the air and made her staggering way across the paddocks, closely shepherded by Willy, who circled her continuously as if to ward off any attackers. But there were none, and the pair of small birds eventually reached their willow tree. Mrs. Willy dropped into the half-built nest to finish her convalescence. Willy fussed around her, perching on the limb and "sweet pretty creaturing" like a screen-struck nurse at the bedside of a famous movie star.

Back at the farm, Jimmy Campbell rubbed his hands in satisfaction.

“I feel like a Boy Scout. I’ve done my good deed for the day,” he remarked to Ginger, who had emerged, sulkily, from underneath the house. Ginger, tail and nose in the air, walked past him in utter disdain, ignoring him completely.