

The Tasmanian fairy penguins

It was dusk. Daryl Blythman was busy in his Tasmanian engineering factory workshop, cutting a sheet of steel. The saw spun quickly, and whined as it bit into the metal. Daryl wore goggles to protect his eyes from flying fragments. He guided the metal carefully; the steel had to be the exact size.

Daryl and his staff were working late to repair a fishing boat. Suddenly, Daryl saw a movement. Waddling towards him was a fairy penguin, followed by another. Quickly he switched the saw off. The blade slowed, then stopped.

Squark, squark! Then two penguins waddled under the saw bench and across the factory floor. They slipped through the gap under the stairs where they had a nest.

The penguins had first arrived several years earlier, found a way into the factory, and a dark and cosy spot, like a burrow. They made a nest in a corner on a concrete floor.

They lined it with pieces of paper, lunch wrappers, a cigarette packet and bits of plastic foam. Every year they returned to the same place to rear their chicks.

Meanwhile, Daryl still had the boat to complete.

Next day another worker needed a sheet of steel. He found some steel but it was too thick. He took it to the large steel roller. The workman thumped on the stand with his fist. Knock, knock, knock! 'Come out!' he shouted. 'Come out, if you're in there!'

Out came the penguins, squawking. They didn't like it in the bright light, and tried to get back to their nest.

The workman waved his arms. 'Move back a bit! I have to roll this metal.'

He switched the power on and the machine hummed. He guided the metal between two huge rollers. The penguins didn't like waiting. They ran at the man, flapped their flippers and pecked at him. Only when the power had been turned off could the penguins return to their nest.

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