

**this
could
be
everything**

Also by Eva Rice:

Fiction

Standing Room Only

Butterfly Sting

The Lost Art of Keeping Secrets

The Misinterpretation of Tara Jupp

Love Notes for Freddie

Non-fiction

Who's Who in Enid Blyton

eva rice
this
could
be
everything



**SIMON &
SCHUSTER**

London · New York · Sydney · Toronto · New Delhi

First published in Great Britain by Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2023

Copyright © Eva Rice, 2023

The right of Eva Rice to be identified as author
of this work has been asserted in accordance with the
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Simon & Schuster UK Ltd
1st Floor
222 Gray's Inn Road
London WC1X 8HB

Simon & Schuster Australia, Sydney
Simon & Schuster India, New Delhi

www.simonandschuster.co.uk
www.simonandschuster.com.au
www.simonandschuster.co.in

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Hardback ISBN: 978-1-3985-1016-6
Trade Paperback ISBN: 978-1-3985-1017-3
eBook ISBN: 978-1-3985-1018-0
Audio ISBN: 978-1-3985-2236-7

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and
incidents are either a product of the author's imagination or are used
fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual people living or dead,
events or locales is entirely coincidental.

The author and publishers have made all reasonable efforts to contact
copyright-holders for permission, and apologise for any omissions or errors in the
form of credits given. Corrections may be made to future printings.

Typeset in the Bembo by M Rules
Printed and Bound in the UK using 100% Renewable
Electricity at CPI Group (UK) Ltd



For Claire Paterson Conrad.
Agent, friend, keeper of the faith.

*'The canary is like a man's soul. It sees
bars around it, but instead of despairing,
it sings.'*

NIKOS KAZANTZAKIS

*'Live baby live
Now that the day is over'*

INXS 'New Sensation'

Yellow

Yesterday evening, something happened. And I don't like things happening to me, it's why I stay put, so that they *don't*. But when I walked downstairs at eight minutes past eight for a glass of water, I saw a small yellow bird standing on top of a packet of Weetabix in the corner of the kitchen.

An instinct made me look behind me, as if someone might be standing there watching me watching the bird, but there was no one; Ann had forced Robert to the theatre, and they wouldn't be back for hours. The bird took off again, and this time it flew across the room towards me, and I stepped back in alarm, then felt a wave of fury, as though the bird was mocking me for being afraid of it, and it was right, I *was* afraid. It flew onto the salad bowl in the middle of the kitchen table, and it scraped its beak against the green china edge, and then it lowered its yellow head in quick, jerky movements

Eva Rice

down into the bowl and took a bite from a lettuce leaf. Then it looked up at me with black eyes, and I heard a light buzzing in my ears, the sort that you have if you're going under an anaesthetic or you're about to faint, and I felt one of those Mexican waves of anxiety that started deep in my toes and swooshed up my body to the top of my head.

I walked around to the other side of the table so that if the bird took off again, it would fly back towards the window, and out again the way that it had come. But it didn't. Even when I flapped my arms around a bit, and tried to wave it out, it wouldn't leave. It couldn't seem to fly great distances; it was as if it didn't know what to do with all the space. It settled briefly on a tube of cling film on top of the fridge, and shook itself, seeming to take stock, like good old Dennis Rodman pulled out of a Pistons game, pausing for a moment to think. I gulped into the room. There was a tightness inside me, a vertigo, like that time on the high ropes at Casey Finch's sixth birthday party when I went up and up and up without Diana and looked down to see her crying on the ground below, and the earth had swum and sickened me.

I felt an urge to lie down in the middle of the kitchen floor with my eyes closed. I closed my eyes and strained to hear Bruno on the radio and the song coming from the stereo in my bedroom upstairs, but instead I could hear the noise of fluttering wings, primitive, frightening little wings, and I opened my eyes again. Then the bird made a sound, a *chirp*, if you will, and I drew in my breath and went still as still, because honest to God, it felt like a lion had roared.

This Could Be Everything

As I lay there, I decided I would just walk away. This creature had come in; it had to be able to get out. It flew back onto the kitchen table and stood on *The Times*. My uncle had finished the crossword and he always likes to leave it out on view for us, like a child hoping for praise for a painting. The date of the paper startled me, as dates always do now.

May 18th, 1990.

It had been six months now. Six *months*. That's twenty-four chart countdowns on a Sunday night with Bruno Brookes on Radio 1. Ten number ones. Lisa Stansfield the week that it had happened in November, Adamski and Seal now in May. From upstairs I could hear the sound coming from my stereo, faint but clear.

'And it's a non-mover at number 4 for New Kids on the Block with "Cover Girl" . . .'

The cassette would click off after this song; it would need to be turned over. It *had* to be turned over. But if I moved, what would happen? The bird was back on top of the cereal boxes now; the window was still open, yet the bird wasn't interested in going back to where it had been before. Outside, fighting with the Top 40 from my bedroom, I could hear the sound of a fuzzy radio tuned to sport, as Kelvin had opened his window to let in the night air, and let out the sticky smell of spliff and black coffee. My sister had loved Kelvin. Actually, let's be honest, for loved, I actually mean *fancied*. He's very hip and magnetic as anything, and his father still shouts 'Pray for the sister!' every time my aunt Ann walks out of the front door.

Eva Rice

The bird flew from the table towards the shelves and landed on top of a framed photograph of Ann and my mother as children. I wanted to stretch out my hand and touch Mama's face in the picture. I wanted her to talk to me, to tell me why the yellow bird had chosen this kitchen, why it had chosen *me* to find it, where it had come from, when it would go back to wherever that was and leave me alone again. Mama would know.

But Mama wasn't anywhere to tell me anything. And the yellow bird just went right on looking at me.

And the yellow bird seemed to laugh.