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# A Christmas Rainbow for Molly

by Eb Cravens  
Santa Fe, New Mexico

The line waiting to talk with Santa Claus seemed endless. But Molly was ever so patient. She knew exactly what she would say to him.

Besides, six years of living in leg braces from a childhood paralysis had taught Molly about patience.

Finally it was her turn, and as her parents lifted her onto Santa's lap she could feel the warm smile and sense the magic within this man dressed in red.

"Oh yes, that is all I wish," Molly repeated slowly, "All I have ever wished for was a real rainbow."

"That is a very tall request," nodded Santa thoughtfully. "Nevertheless, I will do what I can."

"Thank you," Molly said as she was carried away.

The following weeks were busy and difficult for Molly's mother and father. The more they searched, the more they realized the impossibility of finding a true rainbow for their six year old daughter.

As Christmas eve approached, Molly's spirits rose. Her parents had never seen her cheeks so rosy, her eyes so bright and gay. Though she never spoke of it, everyone knew her wish to Santa was foremost in her mind.

Three days before Christmas, Molly's mom and dad sat talking long into the night. "It just can't be done," her father said. "How can we locate a rainbow for Molly's Christmas gift? I've looked at rainbow coloring books, rainbow T-shirts, rainbow unicorns, even rainbow Christmas cookies. I give up."

"I know, but she has her heart so set on this," her mother answered. "Tomorrow is Christmas eve. I will go to town one more time and look for the best rainbow gift I can find."

The bustle and cheer were overflowing the next day as Molly's mother tramped from store to store, seeking the elusive rainbow to fulfill her daughter's wish. She had about given up hope when she stumbled into a tiny pet shop on a cozy side street.

"Hello," smiled the young owner. "May I help you?"

"Well, I just don't know," Molly's mother replied. She went on to tell the man the entire story of Molly's Christmas wish.

"I might have just the answer for you," he said. "For years I have been in love with a small species of parrot known as the rainbow lorikeet. Come, let me show you."

In the rear of his shop, the owner opened a tub to reveal three fuzzy, brightly feathered baby birds. "These are rainbow lorikeets," he explained, "and a more beautiful, delightful pet parrot there could not be!"

"Oooh, may I hold one?" Molly's mother exclaimed.

"Let's just wash your hands and you can help me feed the babies," he answered. "They are beginning their weaning — something easily accomplished with baby rainbows."

Placed on a clean towel, the lorikeets were given a brief taste of a warm mixture of lory powder, apple juice, baby food, yogurt and spirulina. Remaining formula was squirted into a low glass saucer nearby. The oldest of the babies promptly ran over and began lapping up the liquid food only to be joined by his two siblings. As Molly's mother watched, the pet store owner talked enthusiastically of the pet qualities of the rainbow lorikeets.

"There are about nine different varieties of rainbows," he explained. "These baby Swainson's or Blue Mountain Lorikeets are my particular





*What could be better than a gift of a beautiful rainbow lorikeet? This colorful Blue Mountain Lorikeet is ready to sample the food and fun of the season.*

favorite. Their colors are green, yellow, orange, red, blue and violet melted together in shimmering light.

"Not only are they playful and friendly to strangers, but they can become accomplished talkers in a tiny voice, and are quick to learn. Most of our lorikeets are trained to go 'poo' on command by age 16 weeks.

"We like to sell lorikeets to health food conscious families," he went on. "They love foods prepared in a blender. Banana smoothies, papaya juice, ground coconut, mashed berries, soy milk, even brown rice and soups.

"Of course, rumor has it they are messy birds, but I find the larger lories are by far the more messy. Rainbows seldom throw large pieces of fruit about. What's more, their droppings are often like warm apple juice — not green and smeary like other parrots'. Lory poo on my shirt often does not leave a stain. They are the one bird in my collection I allow run of my household.

"We recommend keeping them in long, low cages near the ground with cedar chips in the bottom tray and plenty of grass and leafy branches to catch squirts.

"Their pet behavior is one of pure joy!" he added. "They are as comfortable on their backs as upright and will hop over to examine any new object placed in their cage or path. Not shy, suspicious parrots at all, these living rainbows . . ."

"That's it!" Molly's mother burst out. "A living rainbow. Oh, how can I ever thank you? I'll take one home to Molly."

"Thank me by giving him a safe,

loving home," the owner replied. "And bring him in to visit regularly."

A half hour later, Molly's mother dropped off bird, cage, food, and written information about caring for their new pet at her next door neighbor and went home for Christmas eve dinner.

That evening as she prepared for bed, Molly was all good cheer. She set out cookies and milk for Santa Claus, said her prayers, and fell asleep almost immediately.

Christmas morning dawned clear and bright. "Molly," her parents chimed, "time to get up." A glass of orange juice, a cup of tea; then the family went in to see what Santa had left beneath the Christmas tree.

Over by the window near her favorite chair was the cage holding the precious baby lorikeet. "A baby rainbow bird," Molly squealed with tears running down her cheeks. "Oh, Rainbow, I knew you'd come."

"Peep," answered the tiny parrot.

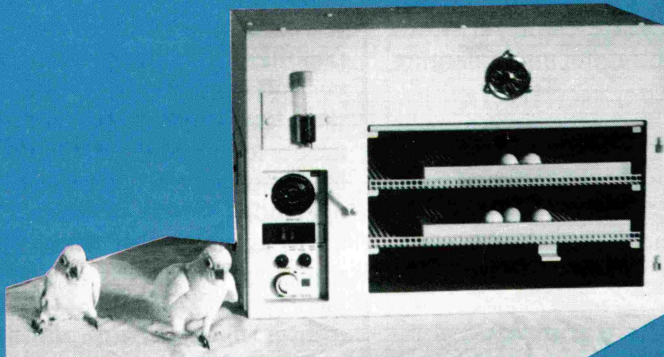
"Thank you, Santa, thank you," Molly remembered out loud.

"Yes, thank you, Santa Claus," her parents echoed joyfully. ●

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