

Ugly

by Paul Mason

“That’s just totally wrong!” Chris swiped his finger angrily across the tablet screen.

“What’s totally wrong?” asked Dad.

“This World’s Ugliest Animals competition. They’ve got the kākāpō in the top six!” Chris showed his father. “The top six! The kākāpō? No way.”

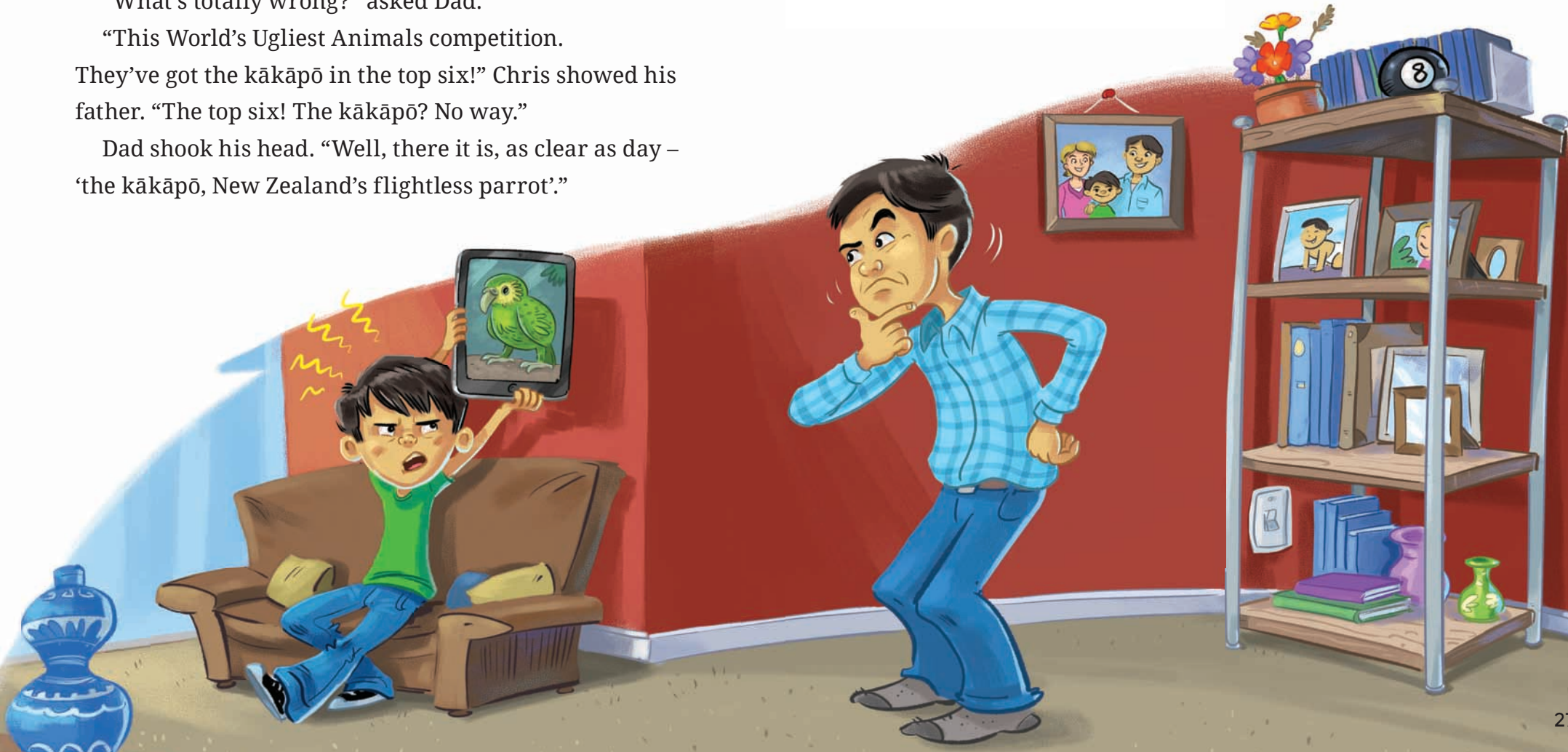
Dad shook his head. “Well, there it is, as clear as day – ‘the kākāpō, New Zealand’s flightless parrot’.”

“But why’d they have to pick on the kākāpō?”

The kākāpō’s a great bird.” Chris stared at the large parrot on the screen. Its green feathers were like fern fronds. It had a soft, brown face and dark eyes. No chance the kākāpō was ugly.

“Well, why don’t you do something about it seeing as you’re so worked up,” suggested Dad. “Protest! Make a poster. Go on a demonstration,” he joked.

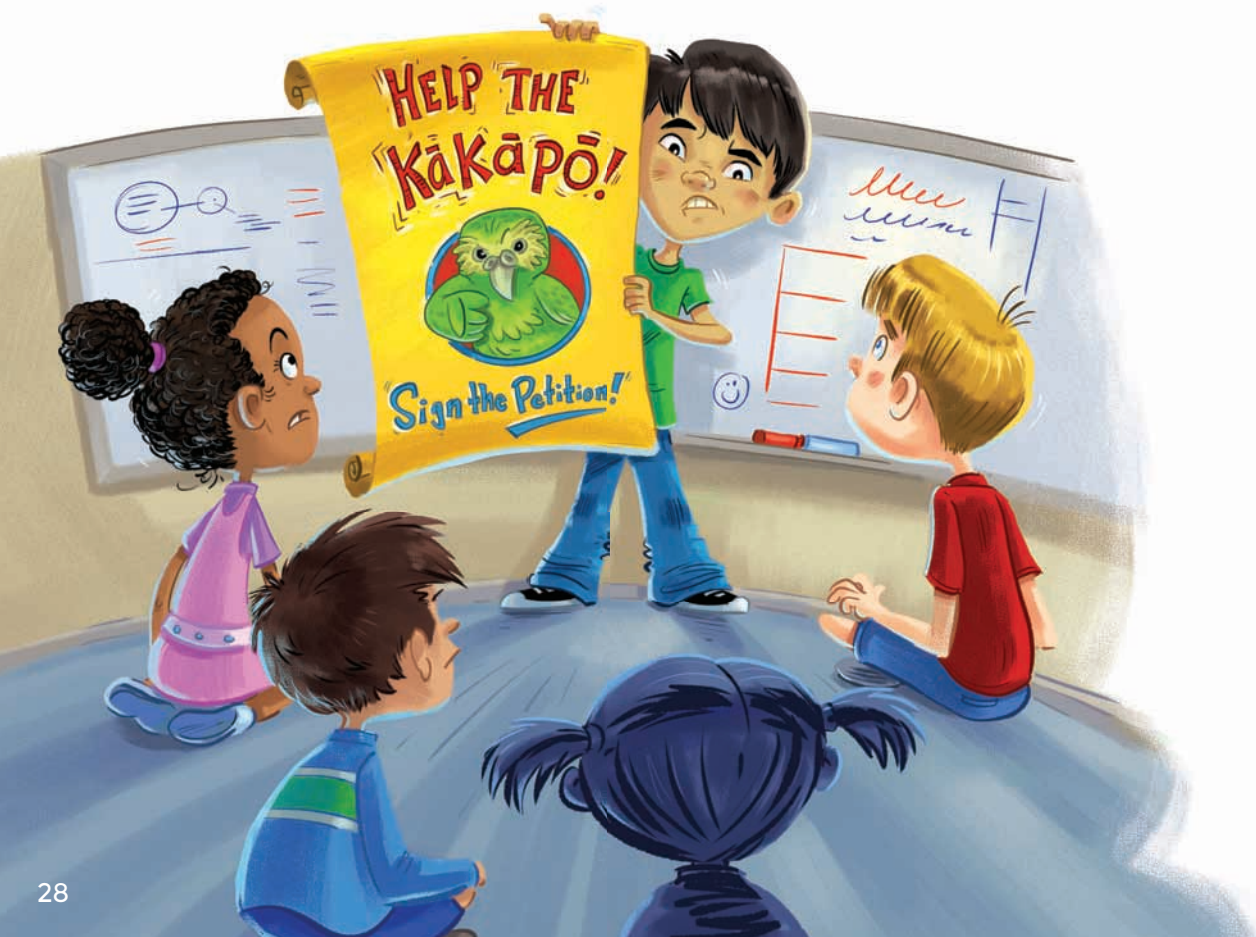
“I think I just might,” said Chris.



The next day, Chris marched into school clutching a rolled-up poster. At news time, he stood at the front of the class and opened it up. In the middle was a big picture of a kākāpō. The kākāpō was pointing with one of its wings and saying “Help the Kākāpō!” and underneath the picture, it said “Sign the Petition!” Some of the kids giggled.

“What’s the petition for?” asked Mr Stevens.

“Some organisation has called the kākāpō one of the world’s ugliest animals,” said Chris. “I want them to take the kākāpō off the list.” He told the class about the website.



“Let’s take a look,” said Mr Stevens, bringing it up on the projector.

There on the screen was a fish. But not just any fish. It was like a blob of pale, pink jelly that someone had dropped on the floor. It had a big, floppy nose; a sad, rubbery mouth; and tiny eyes.

The whole class went “Ewwwww!”

“Yuk, what is that?” asked Amelia.

“The blobfish,” read Mr Stevens. “According to this, it’s the winner of the World’s Ugliest Animal competition.”

“They’ve got that right,” said Jackson.

Mr Stevens scrolled down the webpage to some of the other animals. There was a small, furry animal called an aye-aye, an elephant seal with a dangly trunk, and a mole with a weird, star-shaped nose spread over its face. There were lots more. Each one made the class groan.

Chris held up his poster again. “You see what I mean? How can they include the kākāpō with those guys?”

“Well, I think that blobfish is kind of cute,” said Emily. The rest of the class went “Ewwwww” again.

“That warthog is pretty cool looking, too,” said Mark.

“It just goes to show,” said Mr Stevens. “We all have different ideas about what is beautiful and what is ugly. There’s an old saying, ‘Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.’” He turned to Chris. “You can hand out the petition at lunchtime if you like,” he said with a smile.

At lunchtime, Chris set up a table on the courts. “Sign my petition!” he called out. “The kākāpō needs you!” Quite a few students signed their names.

“Pretty cool how you’re helping wildlife,” said Emily as she signed the petition. “More people ought to do stuff like this.”

That night, Chris found the contact details on the organisation’s website. With his dad’s help, he wrote an email telling about his campaign and all the names on the petition. He ended by saying how he wanted the kākāpō taken off the ugly list. Then he hit send.

The next day at breakfast, Dad said, “You’ve got mail.”

“That was quick,” said Chris, taking the tablet from Dad.

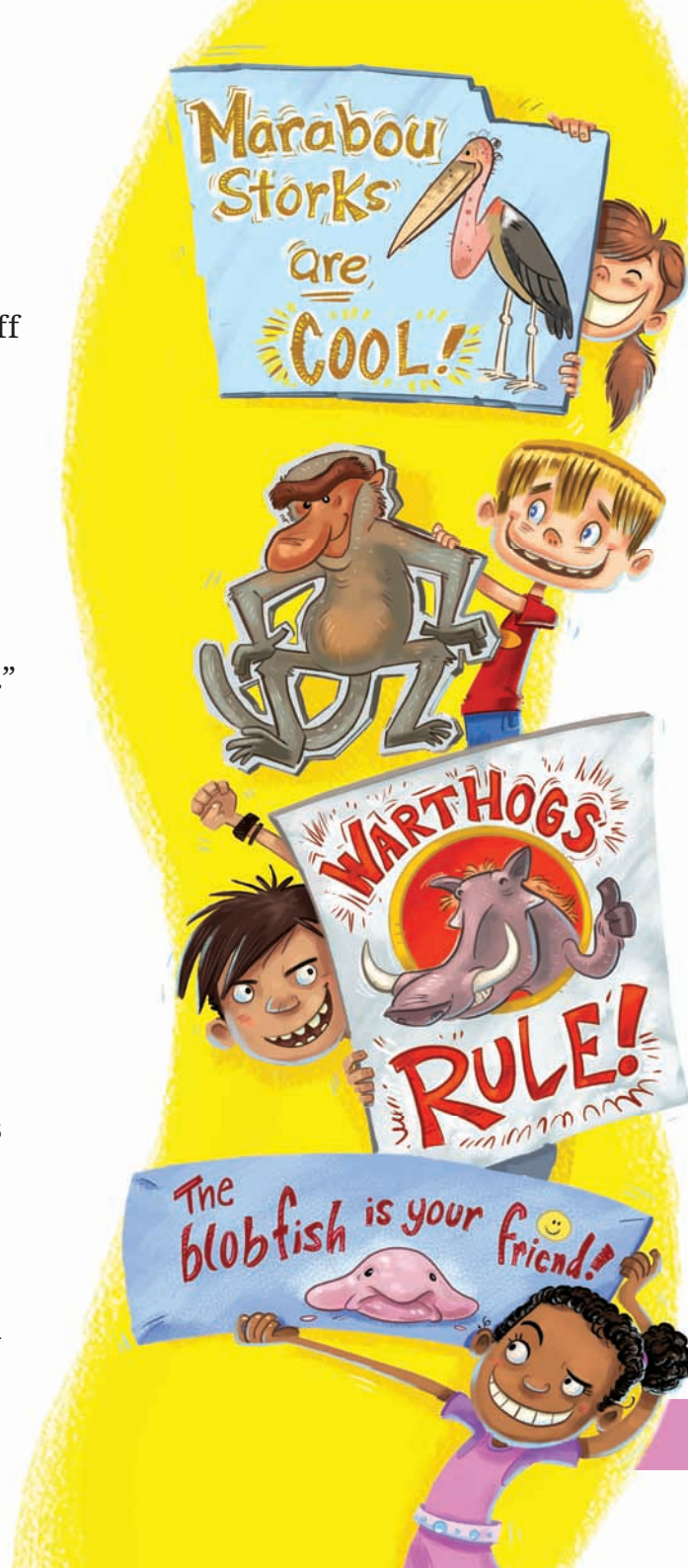
He read the email. “Oh,” he said. It wasn’t quite what he was expecting.

“What did they say?” asked Dad.

“They said that they don’t really think the kākāpō is ugly. They just came up with the Ugliest Animals Competition to get people’s attention. Most of the animals on the list are endangered,” Chris read. “It was to get people to think about them, not just the beautiful endangered animals like pandas.”

“Well, it got you to sit up and take notice,” said Dad.

“True,” said Chris. “I guess that means it’s kind of OK for the kākāpō to be on the list.”



Before school, Chris made some changes to the words on his poster. He added “Make a donation for kākāpō conservation – see Chris.”

Just as he was finishing, Emily marched into the classroom with a banner that showed a pink splat. Above the splat, it said “The blobfish is your friend!”

Then Mark came struggling through the door with a “Warthogs Rule!” poster, followed by Jackson holding a cardboard monkey. Amelia brought up the rear with an enormous sign saying “Marabou Storks are Cool!”

“Wow, this whole ugly animal thing really does work,” thought Chris. “Hey,” he said with a smile. “I’ve got something to tell you ...”

illustrations by Scott Pearson



Warthog



Proboscis Monkey

**Ugliest Animals:
Some of the Top Ten**



Aye-Aye



Kākāpō



Elephant Seal



Marabou Stork

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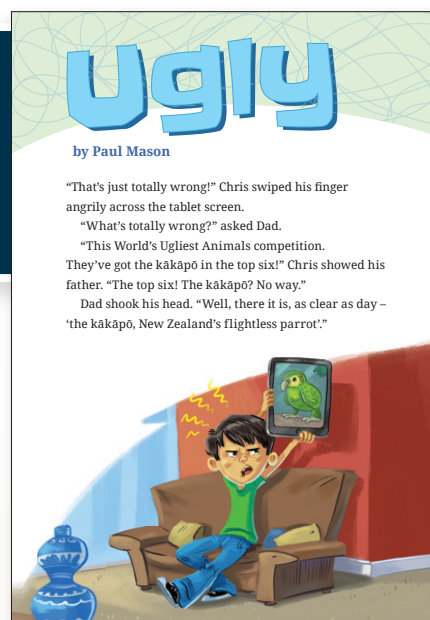
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