**black shag.**

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**Black Shag was a lonely bird, but she liked her loneliness, and drove away intruders. Her special haunt was a narrow inlet of the sea, winding between peaceful bush that overlooked the little lapping waves. Here she would swim for hours, her graceful head sometimes erect, sometimes bent beneath the sea to watch for prey. A silvery gleam, a movement of a fin, and like a hurled stone she would dive and pursue, hunting the fleeing fish until she overtook it. Seizing it in her long, hooked bill, she bore it up to the air, there to gulp it whole down her capacious throat. Then below she would go again to hunt for further feasts. Her appetite was marvellous; she was no delicate lady in her feeding. Fortunately, fish were plentiful and varied in her inlet of the sea. Tired of swimming, she would fly up to her favourite perching place--a great bare rock that overhung the water. Here she spread her long black wings to dry them in the sun, and preened her bronzy back and white throat band and glossy breast. She could not, like a duck, shake herself but once and then be dry, for so little oil have her kind for their feathers that "as wet as a shag" has become a world-wide saying. But sun and winds helped in her drying, and time made no calls on her. For long hours she sat there at her ease, silent, solitary, satisfied.**

**Winter passed. With the first warm breath of early spring, when fresh life woke in bush and shore and sea, her last year's mate came up the inlet seeking her. "Come with me," he said. At the words mother-longings stirred in Black Shag's heart. Into her thoughts came memories of nest and shining eggs, of helpless babies, and her love for them. She left her rock. With her mate she flew along the coast to where her people built their rookery year by year. Here were friends and busy life. High cliffs faced the sea. On the top, where strong, coarse grasses grew, nests were built beside each other. Sticks were gathered and twisted in and out, grass blades were pulled and laid amongst the sticks; then the nest was ready for the eggs. Three handsome green-white eggs soon lay in Black Shag's nest. Then followed the long sitting, the mother's patient sacrifice of food and freedom; till at last the eggs were hatched, and three half-fluffed, half-naked babies lay beneath the sheltering breast. They showed no beauty to a casual eye, but their mother thought them perfect. In her fond eyes no baby birds could be more sweet and lovable. Gone was now the old life for Black Shag, with its leisureliness and ease. With three children to feed and guard, the days became a rush of work. "You must help, father," she said to her mate. In turns they fished, swallowing enough for the babies as well as themselves, then returning to the nest and drawing up from their long food-bags the delicious oily fish that the children loved. block 2**

**The babies grew fat. Fluffy down grew so thickly over them that they began to look like brown and white balls of wool. Nestling together, they kept one another warm; gradually Black Shag found herself able to leave them for longer and longer periods. They fished together now, she and the father Shag. As the children grew bigger still, and more and more able to take care of themselves, the parents stayed away all day. They flew off in the morning to their favourite fishing waters, satisfied their own hunger, and loaded themselves with extra fish, then returned at nightfall to feed the clamouring little ones. The summer months passed by. In the nest the children grew full-sized and feathered. "Learn to swim and fish for yourselves," cried Black Shag, and she tumbled them one by one into the water below. There they floundered about till they learned to paddle with their black webbed feet. Then the mother left them, knowing that her work for them was done. Back to her old haunt she went, to live again, till spring returned, her life of leisured ease. In her narrow inlet, where peaceful bush overlooks the little lapping waves, she hunts her daily feasts, or sits for hours upon her bare brown rock, silent, satisfied, alone.**