

Policeman Bluejay

By

L. Frank Baum

To the Children

I MUST admit that the great success of the "TWINKLE TALES" has astonished me as much as it has delighted the solemn-eyed, hard working publishers. Therefore I have been encouraged to write a new "TWINKLE BOOK," hoping with all my heart that my little friends will find it worthy to occupy a place beside the others on their pet bookshelves. And because the children seem to especially love the story of "Bandit Jim Crow," and bird-life is sure to appeal alike to their hearts and their imaginations, I have again written about birds.

The tale is fantastical, and intended to amuse rather than instruct; yet many of the traits of the feathered folk, herein described, are in strict accordance with natural history teachings and will serve to acquaint my readers with the habits of birds in their wildwood homes. At the same time my birds do unexpected things, because I have written a fairy tale and not a natural history.

The question is often asked me whether Twinkle and Chubbins were asleep or awake when they encountered these wonderful adventures; and it grieves me to reflect that the modern child has been deprived of fairy tales to such an extent that it does not know--as I did when a girl-- that in a fairy story it does not matter whether one is awake or not. You must accept it as you would a fragrant breeze that cools your brow, a draught of sweet water, or the delicious flavor of a strawberry, and be grateful for the pleasure it brings you, without stopping to question too closely its source.

For my part I am glad if my stories serve to while away a pleasant hour before bedtime or keep one contented on a rainy day. In this way they are sure to be useful, and if a little tenderness for the helpless animals and birds is acquired with the amusement, the value of the tales will be doubled.

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CHAPTER I - Little Ones in Trouble

"SEEMS to me, Chub," said Twinkle, "that we're lost."

"Seems to me, Twink," said Chubbins, "that it isn't we that's lost. It's the path."

"It was here a minute ago," declared Twinkle.

"But it isn't here now," replied the boy.

"That's true," said the girl.

It really was queer. They had followed the straight path into the great forest, and had only stopped for a moment to sit down and rest, with the basket between them and their backs to a big tree. Twinkle winked just twice, because she usually took a nap in the afternoon, and Chubbins merely closed his eyes a second to find out if he could see that long streak of sunshine through his pink eyelids. Yet during this second, which happened while Twinkle was winking, the path had run away and left them without any guide or any notion which way they ought to go.

Another strange thing was that when they jumped up to look around them the nearest trees began sliding away, in a circle, leaving the little girl and boy in a clear space. And the trees continued moving back and back, farther and farther, until all their trunks were jammed tight together, and not even a mouse could have crept between them. They made a solid ring around Twinkle and Chubbins, who stood looking at this transformation with wondering eyes.

"It's a trap," said Chubbins; "and we're in it."

"It looks that way," replied Twinkle, thoughtfully. "Isn't it lucky, Chub, we have the basket with us? If it wasn't for that, we might starve to death in our prison."

"Oh, well," replied the little fellow, "the basket won't last long. There's plenty of starve in the bottom of it, Twinkle, any way you can fix it."

"That's so; unless we can get out. Whatever do you suppose made the trees behave that way, Chubbins?"

"Don't know," said the boy.

Just then a queer creature dropped from a tree into the ring and began moving slowly toward them. It was flat in shape, like a big turtle; only it hadn't a turtle's hard shell. Instead, its body was covered with sharp pricklers, like rose thorns, and it had two small red eyes that looked cruel and wicked. The children could not see how many legs it had, but they must have been very short, because the creature moved so slowly over the ground.

When it had drawn near to them it said, in a pleading tone that sounded soft and rather musical:

"Little girl, pick me up in your arms, and pet me!"

Twinkle shrank back.

"My! I couldn't think of doing such a thing," she answered.

Then the creature said:

"Little boy, please pick me up in your arms, and pet me!"

"Go 'way!" shouted Chubbins. "I wouldn't touch you for anything."

The creature turned its red eyes first upon one and then upon the other.

"Listen, my dears," it continued; "I was once a beautiful maiden, but a cruel tuxix transformed me into this awful shape, and so must I remain until some child willingly takes me in its arms and pets me. Then, and not till then, will I be restored to my proper form."

"Don't believe it! Don't believe it!" cried a high, clear voice, and both the boy and the girl looked quickly around to see who had spoken. But no one besides themselves was in sight, and they only noticed a thick branch of one of the trees slightly swaying its leaves.

"What is a tuxix?" asked Twinkle, who was beginning to feel sorry for the poor creature.

"It is a magician, a sorcerer, a wizard, and a witch all rolled into one," was the answer; "and you can imagine what a dreadful thing that would be."

"Be careful!" cried the clear voice, again. "It is the tuxix herself who is talking to you. Don't believe a word you hear!"

At this the red eyes of the creature flashed fire with anger, and it tried to turn its clumsy body around to find the speaker. Twinkle and Chubbins looked too, but only heard a flutter and a mocking laugh coming from the trees.

"If I get my eye on that bird, it will never speak again," exclaimed the creature, in a voice of fury very different from the sweet tones it had at first used; and perhaps it was this fact that induced the children to believe the warning was from a friend, and they would do well to heed it.

"Whether you are the tuxix or not," said Twinkle, "I never will touch you. You may be sure of that."

"Nor I," declared Chubbins, stoutly, as he came closer to the girl and grasped her hand in his own.

At this the horrid thing bristled all its sharp pricklers in anger, and said:

"Then, if I cannot conquer you in one way, I will in another. Go, both of you, and join the bird that warned you, and live in the air and the trees until you repent your stubbornness and promise to become my slaves. The tuxix has spoken, and her magical powers are at work. Go!"

In an instant Twinkle saw Chubbins shoot through the air and disappear among the leaves of one of the tall trees. As he went he seemed to grow very small, and to change in shape.

"Wait!" she cried. "I'm coming, too!"

She was afraid of losing Chubbins, so she flew after him, feeling rather queer herself, and a moment after was safe in the tall tree, clinging with her toes to a branch and looking in amazement at the boy who sat beside her.

Chubbins had been transformed into a pretty little bird--all, that is, except his head, which was Chubbins' own head reduced in size to fit the bird body. It still had upon it the straw hat, which had also grown small in size, and the sight that met Twinkle's eyes was so funny that she laughed merrily, and her laugh was like the sweet warbling of a skylark.

Chubbins looked at her and saw almost what she saw; for Twinkle was a bird too, except for her head, with its checked sunbonnet, which had grown small enough to fit the pretty, glossy-feathered body of a lark.

Both of them had to cling fast to the branch with their toes, for their arms and hands were now wings. The toes were long and sharp pointed, so that they could be used in the place of fingers.

"My!" exclaimed Twinkle; "you're a queer sight, Chubbins!"

"So are you," answered the boy. "That mean old thing must have 'witched us."

"Yes, we're 'chanted," said Twinkle. "And now, what are we going to do about it? We can't go home, for our folks would be scared nearly into fits. And we don't know the way home, either."

"That's so," said Chubbins, fluttering his little wings to keep from falling, for he had nearly lost his balance.

"What shall we do?" she continued.

"Why, fly around and be gay and happy," said a clear and merry voice beside them. "That's what birds are expected to do!"