

## CHAPTER II - The Forest Guardian

Twinkle and Chubbins twisted their heads around on their little feathered necks and saw perched beside them a big bird of a most beautiful blue color. At first they were a bit frightened, for the newcomer seemed of giant size beside their little lark bodies, and he was, moreover, quite fierce in appearance, having a crest of feathers that came to a point above his head, and a strong beak and sharp talons. But Twinkle looked full into the shrewd, bright eye, and found it good humored and twinkling; so she plucked up courage and asked:

"Were you speaking to us?"

"Very likely," replied the blue bird, in a cheerful tone. "There's no one else around to speak to."

"And was it you who warned us against that dreadful creature below in the forest?" she continued.

"It was."

"Then," said Twinkle, "we are very much obliged to you."

"Don't mention it," said the other. "I'm the forest policeman-- Policeman Bluejay, you know--and it's my duty to look after everyone who is in trouble."

"We're in trouble, all right," said Chubbins, sorrowfully.

"Well, it might have been worse," remarked Policeman Bluejay, making a chuckling sound in his throat that Twinkle thought was meant for a laugh. "If you had ever touched the old tuxix she would have transformed you into toads or lizards. That is an old trick of hers, to get children into her power and then change them into things as loathsome as herself."

"I wouldn't have touched her, anyhow," said Twinkle.

"Nor I!" cried Chubbins, in his shrill, bird-like voice. "She wasn't nice."

"Still, it was good of you to warn us," Twinkle added, sweetly.

The Bluejay looked upon the fluttering little things with kind approval. Then he laughed outright.

"What has happened to your heads?" he asked.

"Nothing, 'cept they're smaller," replied Chubbins.

"But birds shouldn't have human heads," retorted the bluejay. "I suppose the old tuxix did that so the birds would not admit you into their society, for you are neither all bird nor all human. But never mind; I'll explain your case, and you may be sure all the birds of the forest will be kind to you."

"Must we stay like this always?" asked Twinkle, anxiously.

"I really can't say," answered the policeman. "There is said to be a way to break every enchantment, if one knows what it is. The trouble in these cases is to discover what the charm may be that will restore you to your natural shapes. But just now you must make up your minds to live in our forest for a time, and to be as happy as you can under the circumstances."

"Well, we'll try," said Chubbins, with a sigh.

"That's right," exclaimed Policeman Bluejay, nodding his crest in approval. "The first thing you must have is a house; so, if you will fly with me, I will try to find you one."

"I--I'm afraid!" said Twinkle, nervously.

"The larks," declared the bluejay, "are almost the strongest and best flyers we have. You two children have now become skylarks, and may soar so high in the air that you can scarcely see the earth below you. For that reason you need have no fear whatever. Be bold and brave, and all will be well."

He spoke in such a kindly and confident voice that both Twinkle and Chubbins gained courage; and when the policeman added: "Come on!" and flew straight as an arrow into the air above the tree-tops, the two little skylarks with their girl and boy heads followed swiftly after him, and had no trouble in going just as fast as their conductor.

It was quite a pleasant and interesting experience, to dart through the air and be in no danger of falling. When they rested on their outstretched wings they floated as lightly as bubbles, and soon a joyous thrill took possession of them and they began to understand why it is that the free, wild birds are always so happy in their native state.

The forest was everywhere under them, for it was of vast extent. Presently the bluejay swooped downward and alighted near the top of a tall maple tree that had many thick branches.

In a second Twinkle and Chubbins were beside him, their little hearts beating fast in their glossy bosoms from the excitement of their rapid flight. Just in front of them, firmly fastened to a crotch of a limb, was a neatly built nest of a gray color, lined inside with some soft substance that was as smooth as satin.

"Here," said their thoughtful friend, "is the nest that Niddie Thrush and Daisy Thrush built for themselves a year ago. They have now gone to live in a wood across the big river, so you are welcome to their old home. It is almost as good as new, and there is no rent to pay."

"It's awfully small!" said Chubbins.

"Chut-chut!" twittered Policeman Bluejay. "Remember you are not children now, but skylarks, and that this is a thrush's nest. Try it, and you are sure to find it will fit you exactly."

So Twinkle and Chubbins flew into the "house" and nestled their bodies against its soft lining and found that their friend was right. When they were cuddled together, with their slender legs tucked into the feathers of their breasts, they just filled the nest to the brim, and no more room was necessary.

"Now, I'll mark the nest for you, so that everyone will know you claim it," said the policeman; and with his bill he pecked a row of small dots in the bark of the limb, just beside the nest. "I hope you will be very happy here, and this afternoon I will bring some friends to meet you. So now good-bye until I see you again."

"Wait!" cried Chubbins. "What are we going to eat?"

"Eat!" answered the bluejay, as if surprised. "Why, you may feast upon all the good things the forest offers--grubs, beetles, worms, and butterfly-eggs."

"Ugh!" gasped Chubbins. "It makes me sick to just think of it."

"What!"

"You see," said Twinkle, "we are not all birds, Mr. Bluejay, as you are; and that makes a big difference. We have no bills to pick up the things that birds like to eat, and we do not care for the same sort of food, either."

"What do you care for?" asked the policeman, in a puzzled voice.

"Why, cake and sandwiches, and pickles, and cheese, such as we had in our basket. We couldn't eat any live things, you see, because we are not used to it."

The bluejay became thoughtful.

"I understand your objection," he said, "and perhaps you are right, not having good bird sense because the brains in your heads are still human brains. Let me see: what can I do to help you?"

The children did not speak, but watched him anxiously.

"Where did you leave your basket?" he finally asked.

"In the place where the old witch 'chanted us."

"Then," said the officer of the forest, "I must try to get it for you."

"It is too big and heavy for a bird to carry," suggested Twinkle.

"Sure enough. Of course. That's a fact." He turned his crested head upward, trying to think of a way, and saw a black speck moving across the sky.

"Wait a minute! I'll be back," he called, and darted upward like a flash.

The children watched him mount into the sky toward the black speck, and heard his voice crying out in sharp, quick notes. And before long Policeman Bluejay attracted the other bird's attention, causing it to pause in its flight and sink slowly downward until the two drew close together.

Then it was seen that the other bird was a great eagle, strong and sharp-eyed, and with broad wings that spread at least six feet from tip to tip.

"Good day, friend eagle," said the bluejay; "I hope you are in no hurry, for I want to ask you to do me a great favor."

"What is it?" asked the eagle, in a big, deep voice.

"Please go to a part of the forest with me and carry a basket to some friends of mine. I'll show you the way. It is too heavy for me to lift, but with your great strength you can do it easily."

"It will give me pleasure to so favor you," replied the eagle, politely; so Policeman Bluejay led the way and the eagle followed with such mighty

strokes of its wings that the air was sent whirling in little eddies behind him, as the water is churned by a steamer's paddles.

It was not very long before they reached the clearing in the forest. The horrid tuxix had wriggled her evil body away, to soothe her disappointment by some other wicked act; but the basket stood as the children had left it.

The eagle seized the handle in his stout beak and found it was no trouble at all for him to fly into the air and carry the basket with him.

"This way, please--this way!" chirped the bluejay; and the eagle bore the precious burden safely to the maple tree, and hung it upon a limb just above the nest.

As he approached he made such a fierce fluttering that Twinkle and Chubbins were dreadfully scared and flew out of their nest, hopping from limb to limb until they were well out of the monstrous bird's way. But when they saw the basket, and realized the eagle's kindly act, they flew toward him and thanked him very earnestly for his assistance.

"Goodness me!" exclaimed the eagle, turning his head first on one side and then on the other, that both his bright eyes might observe the child-larks; "what curious creatures have you here, my good policeman?"

"Why, it is another trick of old Hautau, the tuxix. She found two children in the forest and enchanted them. She wanted to make them toads, but they wouldn't touch her, so she couldn't. Then she got herself into a fine rage and made the little dears half birds and half children, as you see them. I was in a tree near by, and saw the whole thing. Because I was sorry for the innocent victims I befriended them, and as this basket belongs to them I have asked you to fetch it to their nest."

"I am glad to be of service," replied the eagle. "If ever you need me, and I am anywhere around," he continued, addressing the larks, "just call me, and I will come at once."

"Thank you," said Twinkle, gratefully.

"We're much obliged," added Chubbins.

Then the eagle flew away, and when he was gone Policeman Bluejay also bade them good-bye.

"I'll be back this afternoon, without fail," he said. "Just now I must go and look over the forest, and make sure none of the birds have been in mischief during my absence. Do not go very far from your nest, for a time, or you may get lost. The forest is a big place; but when you are more used to it and to your new condition you can be more bold in venturing abroad."

"We won't leave this tree," promised Twinkle, in an earnest voice.

And Chubbins chimed in with, "That's right; we won't leave this tree until you come back."

"Good-bye," said the policeman.

"Good-bye," responded Twinkle and Chubbins.

So the bluejay darted away and was soon lost to sight, and Twinkle and Chubbins were left alone to seriously consider the great misfortune that had overtaken them.