

## **CHAPTER IV - An Afternoon Reception**

Twinkle and Chubbins stretched their little necks to see what was coming, and a moment later beheld one of the most gorgeous sights the forest affords-- a procession of all the bright-hued birds that live among the trees or seek them for shelter.

They flew in pairs, one after the other, and at the head of the procession was their good friend Policeman Bluejay, wearing a policeman's helmet upon his head and having a policeman's club tucked underneath his left wing. The helmet was black and glossy and had a big number "1" on the front of it, and a strap that passed under the wearer's bill and held it firmly in place. The club was fastened around the policeman's wing with a cord, so that it could not get away when he was flying.

The birds were of many sizes and of various colorings. Some were much larger than the bluejay, but none seemed so proud or masterful, and all deferred meekly to the commands of the acknowledged guardian of the forest.

One by one the pretty creatures alighted upon the limbs of the tree, and the first thing they all did was to arrange their feathers properly after their rapid flight. Then the bluejay, who sat next to the child-larks, proceeded to introduce the guests he had brought to call upon the newest inhabitants of his domain.

"This is Mr. and Mrs. Robin Redbreast, one of our most aristocratic families," said he, swinging his club around in a circle until Chubbins ducked his head for fear it might hit him.

"You are welcome to our forest," chirped Robin, in a sedate and dignified tone.

"And here is Mr. Goldfinch and his charming bride," continued the policeman.

"Ah, it is a pleasure to meet you," the goldfinch murmured, eyeing the child-larks curiously, but trying to be so polite that they would not notice his staring.

"Henny Wren and Jenny Wren," proceeded the policeman.

Twinkle and Chubbins both bowed politely.

"Well, well!" croaked a raven, in a hoarse voice, "am I to wait all day while you introduce those miserable little insignificant grub-eaters?"

"Be quiet!" cried Policeman Bluejay, sternly.

"I won't," snapped the raven.

It happened so quickly that the children saw nothing before they heard the thump of the club against the raven's head.

"Caw--waw--waw--waw! Murder! Help!" screamed the big bird, and flew away from the tree as swiftly as his ragged wings would carry him.

"Let him go," said a sweet brown mocking-bird. "The rowdy is always disturbing our social gatherings, and no one will miss him if he doesn't come back."

"He is not fit for polite society," added a nuthatcher, pruning her scarlet wings complacently.

So the policeman tucked the club under his wing again and proceeded with the introductions, the pewees and the linnets being next presented to the strangers, and then the comical little chicadees, the orioles, bobolinks, thrushes, starlings and whippoorwills, the latter appearing sleepy because, they explained, they had been out late the night before.

These smaller birds all sat in rows on the limbs beside Twinkle and Chubbins; but seated upon the stouter limbs facing them were rows of bigger birds who made the child-larks nervous by the sharp glances from their round, bright eyes. Here were blackbirds, cuckoos, magpies, grosbeaks and wood-pigeons, all nearly as big and fierce-looking as Policeman Bluejay himself, and some so rugged and strong that it seemed strange they would submit to the orders of the officer of the law. But the policeman kept a sharp watch upon these birds, to see that they attempted no mischievous pranks, and they must have been afraid of him because they behaved very well after the saucy raven had left them. Even the chattering magpies tried to restrain their busy tongues, and the blackbirds indulged in no worse pranks than to suddenly spread their wings and try to push the pigeons off the branch.

Several beautiful humming-birds were poised in the air above this gathering, their bodies being motionless but their tiny wings fluttering so swiftly that neither Twinkle nor Chubbins could see them at all.

Policeman Bluejay, having finally introduced all the company to the child-larks, began to relate the story of their adventures, telling the birds how the

wicked tuxix had transformed them into the remarkable shapes they now possessed.

"For the honor of our race," he said, "we must each and every one guard these little strangers carefully, and see that they come to no harm in our forest. You must all pledge yourselves to befriend them on all occasions, and if any one dares to break his promise he must fight with me to the death--and you know very well what that means."

"We do," said a magpie, with a shrill laugh. "You'll treat us as you did Jim Crow. Eh?"

The policeman did not notice this remark, but the other birds all looked grave and thoughtful, and began in turn to promise that they would take care to befriend the child-larks at all times. This ceremony having been completed, the birds began to converse in a more friendly and easy tone, so that Twinkle and Chubbins soon ceased to be afraid of them, and enjoyed very much their society and friendly chatter.