

## **CHAPTER V - The Oriole's Story**

"We are really very happy in this forest," said an oriole that sat next to Twinkle, "and we would have no fears at all did not the men with guns, who are called hunters, come here now and then to murder us. They are terribly wild and ferocious creatures, who have no hearts at all."

"Oh, they must have hearts," said Twinkle, "else they couldn't live. For one's heart has to beat to keep a person alive, you know."

"Perhaps it's their gizzards that beat," replied the oriole, reflectively, "for they are certainly heartless and very wicked. A cousin of mine, Susie Oriole, had a very brave and handsome husband. They built a pretty nest together and Susie laid four eggs in it that were so perfect that she was very proud of them.

"The eggs were nearly ready to hatch when a great man appeared in the forest and discovered Susie's nest. Her brave husband fought desperately to protect their home, but the cruel man shot him, and he fell to the ground dead. Even then Susie would not leave her pretty eggs, and when the man climbed the tree to get them she screamed and tried to peck out his eyes. Usually we orioles are very timid, you know; so you can well understand how terrified Susie was to fight against this giant foe. But he had a club in his hand, with which he dealt my poor cousin such a dreadful blow that she was sent whirling through the air and sank half unconscious into a bush a few yards away.

"After this the man stole the eggs from the nest, and also picked up the dead body of Susie's husband and carried it away with him. Susie recovered somewhat from the blow she had received, and when she saw her eggs and her poor dead husband being taken away, she managed to flutter along after the man and followed him until he came to the edge of the forest. There he had a horse tied to a tree, and he mounted upon the beast's back and rode away through the open country. Susie followed him, just far enough away to keep the man in sight, without being noticed herself.

"By and bye he came to a big house, which he entered, closing the door behind him. Susie flew into a tree beside the house and waited sorrowfully but in patience for a chance to find her precious ones again.

"The days passed drearily away, one after another, but in about a week my cousin noticed that one of the windows of the house had been left open. So

she boldly left her tree and flew in at the window, and luckily none of the people who lived in the house happened to be in the room.

"Imagine Susie's surprise when she saw around the sides of the room many birds sitting silently upon limbs cut from trees, and among them her own husband, as proud and beautiful as he had ever been before the cruel man had killed him! She quickly flew to the limb and perched beside her loved one.

"'Oh, my darling!' she cried, 'how glad I am to have found you again, and to see you alive and well when I had mourned you as dead. Come with me at once, and we will return to our old home in the forest.'

"But the bird remained motionless and made no reply to her loving words. She thrust her bill beside his and tried to kiss him, but he did not respond to the caress and his body was stiff and cold.

"Then Susie uttered a cry of grief, and understood the truth. Her husband was indeed dead, but had been stuffed and mounted upon the limb to appear as he had in life. Small wires had been pushed through his legs to make his poor body stand up straight, and to Susie's horror she discovered that his eyes were only bits of glass! All the other birds in the room were stuffed in the same way. They looked as if they were alive, at the first glance; but each body was cold and every voice mute. They were mere mockeries of the beautiful birds that this heartless and cruel man had deprived of their joyous lives.

"Susie's loving heart was nearly bursting with pain as she slowly fluttered toward the open window by which she had entered. But on her way a new anguish overtook her, for she noticed a big glass case against the wall in which were arranged clusters of eggs stolen from birds of almost every kind. Yes; there were her own lovely eggs, scarcely an inch from her face, but separated from her by a stout glass that could not be broken, although she madly dashed her body against it again and again.

"Finally, realizing her helplessness, poor Susie left the room by the open window and flew back to the forest, where she told us all the terrible thing she had seen. No one was able to comfort her, for her loving heart was broken; and after that she would often fly away to the house to peer through the window at her eggs and her beautiful husband.

"One day she did not return, and after waiting for her nearly two weeks we sent the bluejay to see what had become of her. Our policeman found the house, and also found the window of the room open.

"He boldly entered, and discovered Susie and her husband sitting side by side upon the dried limb, their bodies both stiff and dead. The man had caught the poor wife at last, and the lovers were reunited in death.

"Also Policeman Bluejay found his grandfather's mummy in this room, and the stuffed mummies of many other friends he had known in the forest. So he was very sorrowful when he returned to us, and from that time we have feared the heartless men more than ever."

"It's a sad story," sighed Twinkle, "and I've no doubt it is a true one. But all men are not so bad, I'm sure."

"All men who enter the forest are," answered the oriole, positively. "For they only come here to murder and destroy those who are helpless before their power, but have never harmed them in the least. If God loves the birds, as I am sure He does, why do you suppose He made their ferocious enemies, the men?"

Twinkle did not reply, but she felt a little ashamed.