

CHAPTER X - In the Eagle's Nest

Gradually the forest passed out of sight and only bleak, rugged mountains were below them. One peak rose higher than the others, and faced the sea, and to this point the great eagle directed their flight.

On a crag that jutted out from the mountain was the eagle's nest, made of rude sticks of wood gathered from the forest. Sitting beside the nest was Mrs. Eagle, larger and more pompous even than her husband, while squatting upon the edge of the nest were two half-grown eaglets with enormous claws and heads, but rather skinny bodies that were covered with loose and ragged feathers. Neither the nest nor the eaglets appeared to be very clean, and a disagreeable smell hung over the place.

"This is funny," said Mrs. Eagle, looking at the child-larks with surprise. "Usually you kill your game before you bring it home, Jonathan; but today it seems our dinner has flown to us willingly."

"They're for us!" cried one of the eaglets, making a quick dash to seize Twinkle, who darted out of his reach.

"One for each of us!" screamed the other eaglet, rushing at Chubbins.

"Peace--be quiet!" said the eagle, sternly. "Cannot you tell friends from food, you foolish youngsters? These are two little friends of mine whom I have invited to visit us; so you must treat them in a civil manner."

"Why not eat them?" asked one of the eaglets, looking at the child-larks with hungry eyes.

"Because I forbid you. They are my guests, and must be protected and well treated. And even if this were not so, the larks are too small to satisfy your hunger, you little gluttons."

"Jonathan," said Mrs. Eagle, coldly, "do not reproach our offspring for their hunger. We sent you out this morning to procure a supply of food, and we expected you to bring us home something good to eat, instead of these useless little creatures."

The eagle seemed annoyed at being scolded in this manner.

"I had an adventure in the forest," he said, "and came near being shot and killed by a man. That is the reason I came home so soon."

Twinkle and Chubbins were standing together at the edge of the crag when one of the eaglets suddenly spread out his wide, stiff wings and pushed them over the precipice. They recovered themselves before they had fallen far, and flew to the ledge again just in time to see the father eagle cuff his naughty son very soundly. But the mother only laughed in her harsh voice and said:

"It is so early in the day, Jonathan, that I advise you to go again in search of food. Our sweet darlings will not be comforted until they have eaten."

"Very well," answered the eagle. "I am sorry you cannot treat my guests more politely, for they are all unaccustomed to such rudeness. But I see that it will be better for me to take them away with me at once."

"Do," said Mrs. Eagle; and the eaglets cried: "Better let us eat 'em, daddy. They are not very big, but they're better than no breakfast at all."

"You're dis'greeable things!" said Twinkle, indignantly; "and I don't like you a bit. So there!"

"Come on, Twink," said Chubbins. "Let's go away."

"I will take you back to the forest," the eagle declared, and at once rose into the air. Twinkle and Chubbins followed him, and soon the nest on the crag was left far behind and they could no longer hear the hoot of the savage young ones.

For a time the eagle flew in silence. Then he said:

"You must forgive my family for not being more hospitable. You must know that they live a very lonely life, and have no society because every living thing fears them. But I go abroad more and see more of the world, so I know very well how guests ought to be treated."

"You have been very kind to us, Mr. Eagle," replied the girl-lark, "and you saved my life when the dog would have killed me. I don't blame you any for what your family did. My mama says lots of people show off better abroad than they do at home, and that's your case exactly. If I were you I wouldn't take any more visitors to my nest."

"I do not intend to," answered the eagle. "But I am glad that you think well of me personally, if you do not of my family, and I assure you it has been a real pleasure to me to assist you. Were you like ordinary birds, you would be beneath my notice; but I am wise enough to understand that you are very

unusual and wonderful little creatures, and if at any time I can serve you further, you have but to call me, and I will do what I can for you."

"Thank you very much," replied Twinkle, who realized that the great bird had acted more gently toward them than it is the nature of his wild race to do.

They had just reached the edge of the forest again when they saw a bird approaching them at a great speed, and soon it came near enough for them to see that it was Policeman Bluejay. He wore his official helmet and carried his club, and as soon as he came beside them he said:

"Thank goodness I've found you at last. I've been hunting for you an hour, and began to fear you had met with some misfortune."

"We've been with the eagle," said the girl. "He saved our lives and carried us away from where the dreadful men were."

"We have had sad doings in the forest today--very sad, indeed," declared the bluejay, in a grave voice. "The hunters did even more damage than usual. They killed Jolly Joe, the brown bear, and Sam Fox, and Mrs. 'Possum and her babies, and Wisk the squirrel; so that the animals are all in mourning for their friends. But our birds suffered greatly, also. Mrs. Hootaway is dead, and three pigeons belonging to a highly respected family; but the saddest of all is the murder of Mr. and Mrs. Goldfinch, both of whom were killed by the same shot. You may remember, my dears, that they were at your reception yesterday, and as gay and happy as any of the company present. In their nest are now five little children, too young and weak to fly, and there is no one to feed them or look after them."

"Oh, that is dreadful!" exclaimed Twinkle. "Can't Chubbins and I do something for the little goldfinches?"

"Why, that is why I was so anxious to find you," answered Policeman Bluejay. "You haven't laid any eggs yet, and have no one to depend upon you. So I hoped you would adopt the goldfinch babies."

"We will," said Chubbins, promptly. "We can feed them out of our basket."

"Oh, yes," chimed in the girl. "We couldn't catch grubs for them, you know."

"It won't be necessary," observed the policeman, with a sly wink at the eagle. "They're too young yet to know grubs from grub."