

## CHAPTER XIV - A Real Fairyland

As they left the royal arbor of white flowers the Messenger turned to the left and guided his guests through several bright and charming avenues to a grove of trees that had bright blue bark and yellow leaves. Scattered about among the branches were blossoms of a delicate pink color, shaped like a cup and resembling somewhat the flower of the morning-glory.

"Are you hungry?" asked Ephel.

"Oh, I could eat something, I guess," said Chubbins.

The Messenger flew to one of the trees and alighted upon a branch where three of the pink, cup-shaped flowers grew in a row. The children followed him, and sitting one before each blossom they looked within the cups and found them filled with an unknown substance that both looked and smelled delicious and appetizing.

"It is royal amal," said their guide, busily pecking at his cup with his bill. "Help yourselves, little ones. You will find it very nice indeed."

"Well," said Twinkle, "I'd be glad to eat it if I could. But it wouldn't do Chubbins and me a bit of good to stick our noses into these cups."

Ephel turned to look at them.

"True," he remarked; "it was very careless of me to forget that you have no bills. How are you accustomed to eat?"

"Why, with spoons, and knives and forks," said the girl.

"You have but to ask for what you need," declared the royal Messenger.

Twinkle hesitated, scarcely knowing what to say. At last she spoke boldly: "I wish Chub and I had spoons."

Hardly had the words left her lips when two tiny golden spoons appeared in the flower-cups. Twinkle seized the spoon before her in one claw and dipped up a portion of the strange food, which resembled charlotte russe in appearance. When she tasted it she found it delicious; so she eagerly ate all that the blossom contained.

When she looked around for Chubbins she found he was gone. He had emptied his cup and carried the golden spoon to another blossom on a higher limb, where the girl discovered him eating as fast as he could dip up the food.

"Let us go to another tree," said Ephel. "There are many excellent things to eat, and a variety of food is much more agreeable than feasting upon one kind."

"All right," called Chubbins, who had succeeded in emptying the second cup.

As they flew on Twinkle said to the guide:

"I should think the blossoms would all be emptied in a little while."

"Oh, they fill up again in a few moments," replied Ephel. "Should we go back even now, I think we would find them all ready to eat again. But here are the conona bushes. Let us taste these favorite morsels."

The bushes on which they now rested had willow-green branches with silver balls growing thickly upon them. Ephel tapped lightly upon one of the balls with his bill and at once it opened by means of a hinge in the center, the two halves of the ball lying flat, like plates. On one side Twinkle found tiny round pellets of cake, each one just big enough to make a mouthful for a bird. On the other side was a thick substance that looked like jelly.

"The proper thing to do," said their guide, "is to roll one of the pellets in the jelly, and then eat it."

He showed Twinkle how to do this, and as she had brought her golden spoon with her it was easy enough. Ephel opened a ball for Chubbins and then one for himself, and the children thought this food even nicer than the first they had eaten.

"Now we will have some fruit," declared the Messenger. He escorted his charges to an orchard where grew many strange and beautiful trees hanging full of fruits that were all unknown to the lark-children. They were of many odd shapes and all superbly colored, some gleaming like silver and gold and others being cherry-red or vivid blue or royal purple in shade. A few resembled grapes and peaches and cherries; but they had flavors not only varied and delicious but altogether different from the fruits that grow outside of the Birds' Paradise.

Another queer thing was, that as fast as the children ate one fruit, another appeared in its place, and they hopped from branch to branch and tree to tree, trying this one and that, until Chubbins exclaimed:

"Really, Twink, I can't eat another mouthful."

"I'm afraid we've both been stuffing ourselves, Chub," the girl replied. "But these things taste so good it is hard to stop at the right time."

"Would you like to drink?" asked Ephel.

"If you please," Twinkle answered.

"Then follow me," said the guide.

He led them through lovely vistas of wonderful trees, down beautiful winding avenues that excited their admiration, and past clusters of flowering plants with leaves as big as umbrellas and as bright as a painter's palette. The Paradise seemed to have been laid out according to one exquisite, symmetrical plan, and although the avenues or paths between the trees and plants led in every direction, the ground beneath them was everywhere thickly covered with a carpet of magnificent flowers or richly tinted ferns and grasses. This was because the birds never walked upon the ground, but always flew through the air.

Often, as they passed by, the flowers would greet them with sweet songs or choruses and the plants would play delightful music by rubbing or striking their leaves against one another, so that the children's ears were constantly filled with harmony, while their eyes were feasted on the bewildering masses of rich color, and each breath they drew was fragrant with the delicious odors of the blossoms that abounded on every side.

"Of all the fairylands I've ever heard of or read about," said Twinkle, "this certainly is the best."

"It's just a peach of a fairyland," commented Chubbins, approvingly.

"Here is the nectar tree," presently remarked the royal Messenger, and he paused to allow them to observe it.

The tree was all of silver--silver trunk and branches and leaves--and from the end of each leaf or branch dripped sparkling drops of a pink-tinted liquid. These glistened brightly as they fell through the air and lost themselves in a bed of silver moss that covered all the ground beneath the tree.

Ephel flew to a branch and held his mouth open so that a drop from above fell into it. Twinkle and Chubbins followed his example, and found the pink liquid very delightful to drink. It seemed to quench their thirst and refresh them at the same time, and when they flew from the queer dripping tree they were as light-hearted and gay as any two children so highly favored could possibly have felt.

"Haven't you any water in your paradise?" asked the little girl-lark.

"Yes, of course," Ephel answered. "The fountain-lilies supply what water we wish to drink, and the Lustrous Lake is large enough for us all to bathe in. Besides these, we have also the Lake of Dry Water, for you must know that the Lustrous Lake is composed of wet water."

"I thought all water was wet," said Chubbins.

"It may be so in your country," replied the Royal Messenger, "but in our Paradise we have both dry and wet water. Would you like to visit these lakes?"

"If you please," said Twinkle.