

CHAPTER XVIII- Good News

Ephel and the children now bade the good-natured Queen Bee good-bye, and thanked her for her kindness. The Messenger led them far away to another place that he called a "suburb," and as they emerged from a thick cluster of trees into a second flower garden they found the air filled with a great assemblage of butterflies, they being both large and small in size and colored in almost every conceivable manner.

Twinkle and Chubbins had seen many beautiful butterflies, but never such magnificent ones as these, nor so many together at one time. Some of them had wings fully as large as those of the Royal Messenger himself, even when he spread them to their limit, and the markings of these big butterfly wings were more exquisite than those found upon the tail-feathers of the proudest peacocks.

The butterflies paid no attention to their visitors, but continued to flutter aimlessly from flower to flower. Chubbins asked one of them a question, but got no reply.

"Can't they talk?" he enquired of Ephel.

"Yes," said the Messenger, "they all know how to talk, but when they speak they say nothing that is important. They are brainless, silly creatures, for the most part, and are only interesting because they are beautiful to look at. The King likes to watch the flashes of color as they fly about, and so he permits them to live in this place. They are very happy here, in their way, for there is no one to chase them or to stick pins through them when they are caught."

Just then a chime of bells tinkled far away in the distance, and the Royal Messenger listened intently and then said:

"It is my summons to his Majesty the King. We must return at once to the palace."

So they flew into the air again and proceeded to cross the lovely gardens and pass through the avenues of jewelled trees and the fragrant orchards and groves until they came at last to the royal bower of white flowers.

The child-larks entered with their guide and found the gorgeous King Bird of Paradise still strutting on his perch on the golden bush and enjoying the

admiring glances of his courtiers and the ladies of his family. He turned as the children entered and addressed his Messenger, saying:

"Well, my dear Ephel, have you shown the strangers all the sights of our lovely land?"

"Most of them, your Majesty," replied Ephel.

"What do you think of us now?" asked the King, turning his eyes upon the lark-children.

"It must be the prettiest place in all the world!" cried Twinkle, with real enthusiasm.

His Majesty seemed much pleased. "I am very sorry you cannot live here always," he said.

"I'm not," declared Chubbins. "It's too pretty. I'd get tired of it soon."

"He means," said Twinkle, hastily, for she feared the blunt remark would displease the kindly King, "that he isn't really a bird, but a boy who has been forced to wear a bird's body. And your Majesty is wise enough to understand that the sort of life you lead in your fairy paradise would be very different from the life that boys generally lead."

"Of course," replied the King. "A boy's life must be a dreadful one."

"It suits me, all right," said Chubbins.

The King looked at him attentively.

"Would you really prefer to resume your old shape, and cease to be a bird?" he asked.

"Yes, if I could," Chubbins replied.

"Then I will tell you how to do it," said the King. "Since you told me your strange story I have talked with my Royal Necromancer, who knows a good deal about magic, and especially about that same tuxix who wickedly transformed you in the forest. And the Royal Necromancer tells me that if you can find a tingle-berry, and eat it, you will resume your natural form again. For it is the one antidote in all the world for the charm the tuxix worked upon you."

"What is a tingle-berry?" asked Twinkle, anxiously, for this information interested her as much as it did Chubbins.

"I do not know," said the King, "for it is a common forest berry, and never grows in our paradise. But doubtless you will have little trouble in finding the bush of the tingle-berry when you return to the outside world."

The children were both eager to go at once and seek the tingle-berry; but they could not be so impolite as to run away just then, for the King announced that he had prepared an entertainment in their honor.

So they sat on a branch of the golden bush beside their friend Ephel, while at a nod from the King a flock of the beautiful Birds of Paradise flew into the bower and proceeded to execute a most delightful and bewildering set of aerial evolutions. They flew swiftly in circles, spirals, triangles, and solid squares, and all the time that they performed sweet music was played by some unseen band. It almost dazzled the eyes of the child-larks to watch this brilliant flashing of the colored wings of the birds, but the evolutions only lasted for a few minutes, and then the birds flew out again in regular ranks.

Then the little brown lady-birds danced gracefully upon the carpet, their dainty feet merely touching the tips of the lovely flowers. Afterward the flowers themselves took part, and sang a delightful chorus, and when this was finished the King said they would now indulge in some refreshment.

Instantly a row of bell-shaped blossoms appeared upon the golden bush, one for each bird present, and all were filled with a delicious ice that was as cold and refreshing as if it had just been taken from a freezer. Twinkle and Chubbins asked for spoons, and received them quickly; but the others all ate the ices with their bills.

The King seemed to enjoy his as much as any one, and Twinkle noticed that as fast as a blossom was emptied of its contents it disappeared from the branch.

The child-larks now thanked the beautiful but vain King very earnestly for all his kindness to them, and especially for telling them about the tingle-berries; and when all the good-byes had been exchanged Ephel flew with them back to the tree where they had left the Guardian of the Entrance and their faithful comrade, Policeman Bluejay.