

CHAPTER XIX - The Rebels

They were warmly greeted by the bluejay, who asked:

"Did you enjoy the wonderful Paradise?"

"Very much, indeed," cried Twinkle. "But we were sorry you could not be with us."

"Never mind that," returned the policeman, cheerfully. "I have feasted my eyes upon all the beauties visible from this tree, and my good friend the Guardian has talked to me and given me much good advice that will surely be useful to me in the future. So I have been quite contented while you were gone."

The children now gave their thanks to Ephel for his care of them and polite attention, and the Royal Messenger said he was pleased that the King had permitted him to serve them. They also thanked the green-robed Guardian of the Entrance, and then, accompanied by Policeman Bluejay, they quitted the golden tree and began their journey back to the forest.

It was no trouble at all to return. The wind caught their wings and blew against them strongly, so that they had but to sail before the breeze and speed along until they were deep in the forest again. Then the wind moderated, and presently died away altogether, so that they were forced to begin flying in order to continue their journey home.

It was now the middle of the afternoon, and the policeman said:

"I hope all has been quiet and orderly during my absence. There are so many disturbing elements among the forest birds that I always worry when they are left alone for many hours at a time."

"I'm sure they have behaved themselves," returned Twinkle. "They fear your power so much that the evil-minded birds do not dare to offend you by being naughty."

"That is true," said the policeman. "They know very well that I will not stand any nonsense, and will always insist that the laws be obeyed."

They were now approaching that part of the forest where they lived, and as the policeman concluded his speech they were surprised to hear a great flutter of wings among the trees, and presently a flock of big black rooks flew toward them.

At the head of the band was a saucy-looking fellow who wore upon his head a policeman's helmet, and carried under his wing a club.

Policeman Bluejay gave a cry of anger as he saw this, and dashed forward to meet the rooks.

"What does this mean, you rascal?" he demanded, in a fierce voice.

"Easy there, my fine dandy," replied the rook, with a hoarse laugh. "Don't get saucy, or I'll give you a rap on the head!"

The rooks behind him shrieked with delight at this impudent speech, and that made the mock policeman strut more absurdly than ever.

The bluejay was not only astonished at this rebellion but he was terribly angry as well.

"That is my policeman's helmet and club," he said sternly. "Where did you get them?"

"At your nest, of course," retorted the other. "We made up our minds that we have had a miserable bluejay for a policeman long enough; so the rooks elected me in your place, and I'm going to make you birds stand around and obey orders, I can tell you! If you do as I command, you'll get along all right; if you don't, I'll pound you with your own club until you obey."

Again the rooks screamed in an admiring chorus of delight, and when the bluejay observed their great numbers, and that they were all as large as he was, and some even larger and stronger, he decided not to risk an open fight with them just then, but to take time to think over what had best be done.

"I will call the other birds to a meeting," he said to the rook, "and let them decide between us."

"That won't do any good," was the reply. "We rooks have decided the matter already. We mean to rule the forest, after this, and if any one, or all of the birds, dare to oppose us, we'll fight until we force them to serve us. Now, then, what do you intend to do about it?"

"I'll think it over," said Policeman Bluejay.

"Oho! oho! He's afraid! He's a coward!" yelled the rooks; and one of them added:

"Stand up and fight, if you dare!"

"I'll fight your false policeman, or any one of you at a time," replied the bluejay.

"No, you won't; you'll fight us all together, or not at all," they answered.

The bluejay knew it would be foolish to do that, so he turned away and whispered to the lark-children:

"Follow me, and fly as swiftly as you can."

Like a flash he darted high into the air, with Twinkle and Chubbins right behind him, and before the rooks could recover from their surprise the three were far away.

Then the big black birds gave chase, uttering screams of rage; but they could not fly so swiftly as the bluejay and the larks, and were soon obliged to abandon the pursuit.

When at last he knew that they had escaped the rooks, Policeman Bluejay entered the forest again and went among the birds to call them all to a meeting. They obeyed the summons without delay, and were very indignant when they heard of the rebellion of the rooks and the insults that had been heaped upon their regularly elected officer. Judge Bullfinch arrived with his head bandaged with soft feathers, for he had met the rook policeman and, when he remonstrated, had been severely pounded by the wicked bird's club.

"But what can we do?" he asked. "The rooks are a very powerful tribe, and the magpies and cuckoos and blackbirds are liable to side with them, if they seem to be stronger than we are."

"We might get all our people together and fall upon them in a great army, and so defeat them," suggested an oriole.

"The trouble with that plan," decided the judge, "is that we can only depend upon the smaller birds. The big birds might desert us, and in that case we would be badly beaten."

"Perhaps it will be better to submit to the rooks," said a little chickadee, anxiously. "We are neither warriors nor prizefighters, and if we obey our new rulers they may leave us in peace."

"No, indeed!" cried a linnet. "If we submit to them they will think we are afraid, and will treat us cruelly. I know the nature of these rooks, and believe they can only be kept from wickedness by a power stronger than their own."

"Hear me, good friends," said the bluejay, who had been silent because he was seriously thinking; "I have a plan for subduing these rebels, and it is one that I am sure will succeed. But I must make a long journey to accomplish my purpose. Go now quietly to your nests; but meet me at the Judgment Tree at daybreak to-morrow morning. Also be sure to ask every friendly bird of the forest to be present, for we must insist upon preserving our liberty, or else be forever slaves to these rooks."

With these words he rose into the air and sped swiftly upon his errand.

The other birds looked after him earnestly.

"I think it will be well for us to follow his advice," said Judge Bullfinch, after a pause. "The bluejay is an able bird, and has had much experience. Besides, we have ever found him just and honorable since the time we made him our policeman, so I feel that we may depend upon him in this emergency."

"Why, it is all we can do," replied a robin; and this remark was so true that the birds quietly dispersed and returned to their nests to await the important meeting the next morning.