

CHAPTER XX - The Battle

Twinkle and Chubbins flew slowly home to their nests in the maple tree, pausing to ask every bird they met where tingle-berries grew. But none of them could tell.

"I'm sorry we did not ask Policeman Bluejay," said Chubbins.

"I intended to ask him, but we hadn't time," replied Twinkle. "But he will be back to-morrow morning."

"I wonder what he's going to do," remarked the boy.

"Don't know, Chub; but it'll be the right thing, whatever it is. You may be sure of that."

They visited the nest of the baby goldfinches, and found the Widow Chaffinch still caring for the orphans in her motherly way. The little ones seemed to be as hungry as ever, but the widow assured the lark-children that all five had just been fed.

"Did you ever hear of a tingle-berry?" asked Twinkle.

"Yes; it seems to me I have heard of that berry," was the reply. "If I remember rightly my grandmother once told me of the tingle-berries, and warned me never to eat one. But I am quite certain the things do not grow in our forest, for I have never seen one that I can recollect."

"Where do they grow, then?" enquired Chubbins.

"I can't say exactly where; but if they are not in the forest, they must grow in the open country."

The child-larks now returned to their own nest, and sat snuggled up in it during the evening, talking over the day's experiences and the wonderful things they had seen in the fairy-like Paradise of the Birds. So much sight-seeing had made them tired, so when it grew dark they fell fast asleep, and did not waken until the sun was peeping over the edge of the trees.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the girl, "we shall be late at the meeting at the Judgment Tree. Let's hurry, Chub."

They ate a hasty breakfast from the contents of their basket, and after flying to the brook for a drink and a dip in the cool water they hurried toward the Judgment Tree.

There they found a vast assemblage of birds. They were so numerous, indeed, that Twinkle was surprised to find that so many of them inhabited the forest.

But a still greater surprise was in store for her, for immediately she discovered sitting upon the biggest branch of the tree twenty-two bluejays, all in a row. They were large, splendidly plumaged birds, with keen eyes and sharp bills, and at their head was the children's old friend, the policeman.

"These are my cousins," he said to the child-larks, proudly, "and I have brought them from another forest, where they live, to assist me. I am not afraid of the foolish rooks now, and in a moment we shall fly away to give them battle."

The forest birds were all in a flutter of delight at the prompt arrival of the powerful bluejays, and when the word of command was given they all left the tree and flew swiftly to meet the rooks.

First came the ranks of the twenty-two bluejays, with the policeman at their head. Then followed many magpies and cuckoos, who were too clever to side with the naughty rooks when they saw the powerful birds the bluejay had summoned to his assistance. After these flew the smaller birds, of all descriptions, and they were so many and at the same time so angry that they were likely to prove stubborn foes in a fight.

This vast army came upon the rooks in an open space in the forest. Without waiting for any words or explanations from the rebels, the soldierly bluejays fell upon their enemies instantly, fighting fiercely with bill and claw, while the other birds fluttered in the rear, awaiting their time to join in the affray.

Policeman Bluejay singled out the rook which had stolen his helmet and club, and dashed upon him so furiously that the black rebel was amazed, and proved an easy victim to the other's superior powers. He threw down the club and helmet at once; but the bluejay was not satisfied with that, and attacked the thief again and again, until the air was full of black feathers torn from the rook's body.

After all, the battle did not last long; for the rooks soon screamed for mercy, and found themselves badly plucked and torn by the time their assailants finally decided they had been punished enough.

Like all blustering, evil-disposed people, when they found themselves conquered they whined and humbled themselves before the victors and declared they would never again rebel against Policeman Bluejay, the regularly

appointed guardian of the Law of the Forest. And I am told that after this day the rooks, who are not rightly forest birds, betook themselves to the nearest villages and farm houses, and contented themselves with plaguing mankind, who could not revenge themselves as easily as the birds did.

After the fight Policeman Bluejay thanked his cousins and sent them home again, and then the birds all surrounded the policeman and cheered him gratefully for his cleverness and bravery, so that he was the hero of the hour.

Judge Bullfinch tried to make a fine speech, but the birds were too excited to listen to his words, and he soon found himself without an audience.

Of course, Twinkle and Chubbins took no part in the fight, but they had hovered in the background to watch it, and were therefore as proud of their friend as any of the forest birds could be.