

CHAPTER XXI - The Tingle-Berries

When the excitement of the morning had subsided and the forest was quiet again, Policeman Bluejay came to the nest of the child-larks, wearing his official helmet and club. You may be sure that one of the first things Twinkle asked him was if he knew where tingle-berries grew.

"Of course," he replied, promptly. "They grow over at the north edge of the forest, in the open country. But you must never eat them, my dear friend, because they are very bad for birds."

"But the Royal Necromancer of the King Bird of Paradise says the tingle-berries will restore us to our proper forms," explained the girl.

"Oh; did he say that? Then he probably knows," said the bluejay, "and I will help you to find the berries. We birds always avoid them, for they give us severe pains in our stomachs."

"That's bad," observed Chubbins, uneasily.

"Well," said Twinkle, "I'd be willing to have a pain or two, just to be myself again."

"So would I, if it comes to that," agreed the boy. "But I'd rather have found a way to be myself without getting the pain."

"There is usually but one thing that will overcome an enchantment," remarked the bluejay, seriously; "and if it is a tingle-berry that will destroy the charm which the old tuxix put upon you, then nothing else will answer the same purpose. The Royal Necromancer is very wise, and you may depend upon what he says. But it is late, at this season, for tingle-berries. They do not grow at all times of the year, and we may not be able to find any upon the bushes."

"Cannot we go at once and find out?" asked Twinkle, anxiously.

"To be sure. It will grieve me to lose you, my little friends, but I want to do what will give you the most happiness. Come with me, please."

They flew away through the forest, and by and by came upon the open country to the north, leaving all the trees behind them.

"Why, this is the place we entered the forest, that day we got 'chanted!" cried Twinkle.

"So it is," said Chubbins. "I believe we could find our way home from here, Twink."

"But we can't go home like we are," replied the girl-lark. "What would our folks say, to find us with birds' bodies?"

"They'd yell and run," declared the boy.

"Then," said she, "we must find the tingle-berries."

The bluejay flew with them to some bushes which he said were the kind the tingle-berries grew upon, but they were all bare and not a single berry could be found.

"There must be more not far away," said the policeman, encouragingly. "Let us look about us."

They found several clumps of the bushes, to be sure; but unfortunately no berries were now growing upon them, and at each failure the children grew more and more sad and despondent.

"If we have to wait until the bushes bear again," Twinkle remarked, "it will be nearly a year, and I'm sure we can't live in the forest all winter."

"Why not?" asked the policeman.

"The food in our basket would all be gone, and then we would starve to death," was the reply. "We can't eat bugs and worms, you know."

"I'd rather die!" declared Chubbins, mournfully.

The bluejay became very thoughtful.

"If we could find some of the tingle bushes growing near the shade of the forest," he said at last, "there might still be some berries remaining on them. Out here in the bright sunshine the berries soon wither and drop off and disappear."

"Then let us look near the trees," suggested Twinkle.

They searched for a long time unsuccessfully. It was growing late, and they were almost in despair, when a sharp cry from Policeman Bluejay drew the child-larks to his side.

"What is it?" enquired the girl, trembling with nervous excitement.

"Why," said the policeman, "here is a bush at last, and on it are exactly two ripe tingle-berries!"