

CHAPTER XXII - The Transformation

They looked earnestly at the bush, and saw that their friend spoke truly. Upon a high limb was one plump, red berry, looking much like a cranberry, while lower down grew another but smaller berry, which appeared to be partially withered.

"Good!" the lark-children cried, joyfully; and the next moment Chubbins added: "You eat the big berry, Twink."

"Why?" she asked, hesitating.

"It looks as if it had more stomach-ache in it," he replied.

"I'm not afraid of that," said she. "But do you suppose the little berry will be enough for you? One side of it is withered, you see."

"That won't matter," returned the boy-lark. "The Royal Necromancer said to eat one berry. He didn't say a little or a big one, you know, or whether it should be plump or withered."

"That is true," said the girl-lark. "Shall I eat mine now?"

"The sooner the better," Chubbins replied.

"Don't forget me, little friend, when you are a human again," said Policeman Bluejay, sadly.

"I shall never forget you," Twinkle answered, "nor any part of all your kindness to us. We shall be friends forever."

That seemed to please the handsome blue bird, and Twinkle was so eager that she could not wait to say more. She plucked the big, plump berry, put it in her mouth with her little claw, and ate it as soon as possible.

In a moment she said: "Ouch! Oo-oo-oo!" But it did not hurt so badly, after all. Her form quickly changed and grew larger; and while Chubbins and Policeman Bluejay watched her anxiously she became a girl again, and the bird's body with its soft gray feathers completely disappeared.

As she felt herself changing she called: "Good-bye!" to the bluejay; but even then he could hardly understand her words.

"Good-bye!" he answered, and to Twinkle's ears it sounded like "Chir-r-rip-chee-wee!"

"How did it feel?" asked Chubbins; but she looked at him queerly, as if his language was strange to her, and seemed to be half frightened.

"Guess I'll have to eat my berry," he said, with a laugh, and proceeded to pluck and eat it, as Twinkle had done. He yelled once or twice at the cramp the fruit gave him, but as soon as the pain ceased he began to grow and change in the same way his little comrade had.

But not entirely. For although he got his human body and legs back again, all in their natural size, his wings remained as they were, and it startled him to find that the magic power had passed and he was still partly a bird.

"What's the matter?" asked Twinkle.

"Is anything wrong?" enquired the bluejay.

The boy understood them both, although they could not now understand each other. He said to Twinkle:

"I guess the berry wasn't quite big enough." Then he repeated the same thing in the bird language to Policeman Bluejay, and it sounded to Twinkle like:

"Pir-r-r-r--eep--cheep--tweet!"

"What in the world can you do?" asked the girl, quite distressed. "It will be just dreadful if you have to stay like that."

The tears came to Chubbins' eyes. He tried to restrain them, but could not. He flapped his little wings dolefully and said:

"I wish I was either one thing or the other! I'd rather be a child-lark again, and nest in a tree, than to go home to the folks in this way."

Policeman Bluejay had seen his dilemma at the first, and his sharp eyes had been roving over all the bushes that were within the range of his vision. Suddenly he uttered a chirp of delight and dashed away, speedily returning with another tingle-berry in his bill.

"It's the very last one there is!" said he to Chubbins.

"But it is all that I want," cried the boy, brightening at once; and then, regardless of any pain, he ate the berry as greedily as if he was fond of a stomach-ache.

The second berry had a good effect in one way, for Chubbins' wings quickly became arms, and he was now as perfectly formed as he had been before he met with the cruel tuxix. But he gave a groan, every once in a while, and Twinkle suspected that two berries were twice as powerful as one, and made a pain that lasted twice as long.

As the boy and girl looked around they were astonished to find their basket standing on the ground beside them. On a limb of the first tree of the forest sat silently regarding them a big blue bird that they knew must be Policeman Bluejay, although somehow or other he had lost his glossy black helmet and the club he had carried underneath his wing.

"It's almost dark," said Twinkle, yawning. "Let's go home, Chub."

"All right."

He picked up the basket, and for a few minutes they walked along in silence.

Then the boy asked:

"Don't your legs feel heavy, Twink?"

"Yes," said she; "do yours?"

"Awful," said he.