

Chapter III - Jim Crow Finds a New Home

I'LL not try to tell you of all the awful things this bad crow did during the next few days, on his long journey toward the South.

Twinkle almost cried when she found her pet gone; and she really did cry when she saw the poor murdered chickens. But mamma said she was very glad to have Jim Crow run away, and papa scowled angrily and declared he was sorry he had not killed the cruel bird when he shot at it in the corn-field.

In the mean time the runaway crow flew through the country, and when he was hungry he would stop at a farm-house and rob a hen's nest and eat the eggs. It was his knowledge of farm-houses that made him so bold; but the farmers shot at the thieving bird once or twice, and this frightened Jim Crow so badly that he decided to keep away from the farms and find a living in some less dangerous way.

And one day he came to a fine forest, where there were big and little trees of all kinds, with several streams of water running through the woods.

"Here," said Jim Crow, "I will make my home; for surely this is the finest place I am ever likely to find."

There were plenty of birds in this forest, for Jim could hear them singing and twittering everywhere among the trees; and their nests hung suspended from branches, or nestled in a fork made by two limbs, in almost every direction he might look. And the birds were of many kinds, too: robins, thrushes, bullfinches, mocking-birds, wrens, yellowtails and skylarks. Even tiny humming-birds fluttered around the wild flowers that grew in the glades; and in the waters of the brooks waded long-legged herons, while kingfishers sat upon overhanging branches and waited patiently to seize any careless fish that might swim too near them. Jim Crow decided this must be a real paradise for birds, because it was far away from the houses of men. So he made up his mind to get acquainted with the inhabitants of the forest as soon as possible, and let them know who he was, and that he must be treated with proper respect.

In a big fir-tree, whose branches reached nearly to the ground, he saw a large gathering of the birds, who sat chattering and gossiping pleasantly together. So he flew down and joined them.

"Good morning, folks," he said; and his voice sounded to them like a harsh croak, because it had become much deeper in tone since he had grown to his full size.

The birds looked at him curiously, and one or two fluttered their wings in a timid and nervous way; but none of them, little or big, thought best to make any reply.

"Well," said Jim Crow, gruffly, "what's the matter with you fellows? Haven't you got tongues? You seemed to talk fast enough a minute ago."

"Excuse me," replied a bullfinch, in a dignified voice; "we haven't the honor of your acquaintance. You are a stranger."

"My name's Jim Crow," he answered, "and I won't be a stranger long, because I'm going to live here."

They all looked grave at this speech, and a little thrush hopped from one branch to another, and remarked:

"We haven't any crows here at all. If you want to find your own folks you must go to some other place."

"What do I care about my own folks?" asked Jim, with a laugh that made the little thrush shudder. "I prefer to live alone."

"Haven't you a mate?" asked a robin, speaking in a very polite tone.

"No; and I don't want any," said Jim Crow. "I'm going to live all by myself. There's plenty of room in this forest, I guess."

"Certainly," replied the bullfinch. "There is plenty of room for you here if you behave yourself and obey the laws."

"Who's going to make me?" he asked, angrily.

"Any decent person, even if he's a crow, is bound to respect the law," answered the bullfinch, calmly.

Jim Crow was a little ashamed, for he didn't wish to acknowledge he wasn't decent. So he said:

"What are your laws?"

"The same as those in all other forests. You must respect the nests and the property of all other birds, and not interfere with them when they're hunting for food. And you must warn your fellow-birds whenever there is danger, and assist them to protect their young from prowling beasts. If you obey these laws, and do not steal from or interfere with your neighbors, you have a right to a nest in our forest."

"To be quite frank with you, though," said the robin, "we prefer your room to your company."

"I'm going to stay," said the crow. "I guess I'm as good as the rest of you; so you fellows just mind your own business and I'll mind mine."

With these words he left them, and when he had mounted to a position above the trees he saw that one tall, slim pine was higher than all the rest, and that at its very top was a big deserted nest.