

Chapter IV - Jim Crow Becomes a Robber

IT looked like a crow's nest to Jim, so he flew toward the pine tree and lit upon a branch close by. One glance told him that at some time it really must have been the home of birds of his kind, who for some reason had abandoned it long ago. The nest was large and bulky, being made of strong sticks woven together with fine roots and grasses. It was rough outside, but smooth inside, and when Jim Crow had kicked out the dead leaves and twigs that had fallen into it, he decided it was nearly as good as new, and plenty good enough for a solitary crow like him to live in. So with his bill he made a mark on the nest, that every bird might know it belonged to him, and felt that at last he had found a home.

During the next few days he made several attempts to get acquainted with the other birds, but they were cold and distant, though very polite to him; and none of them seemed to care for his society.

No bird ever came near his nest, but he often flew down to the lower trees and perched upon one or another of them, so gradually the birds of the forest got used to seeing him around, and paid very little attention to his actions.

One day Mrs. Wren missed two brown eggs from her nest, and her little heart was nearly broken with grief. It took the mocking bird and the bullfinch a whole afternoon to comfort her, while Mr. Wren hopped around in nearly as much distress as his wife. No animals had been seen in the forest who would do this evil thing, so no one could imagine who the thief might be.

Such an outrage was almost unknown in this pleasant forest, and it made all the birds nervous and fearful. A few days later a still greater horror came upon them, for the helpless young children of Mrs. Linnet were seized one morning from their nest, while their parents were absent in search of food, and were carried away bodily. Mr. Linnet declared that on his way back to his nest he had seen a big black monster leaving it, but had been too frightened to notice just what the creature looked like. But the lark, who had been up very early that morning, stated that he had seen no one near that part of the forest except Jim Crow, who had flown swiftly to his nest in the tall pine-tree.

This was enough to make all the birds look upon Jim Crow with grave suspicion, and Robin Redbreast called a secret meeting of all the birds to discuss the question and decide what must be done to preserve their nests from the robber. Jim Crow was so much bigger and fiercer than any of the

others that none dared accuse him openly or venture to quarrel with him; but they had a good friend living not far away who was not afraid of Jim Crow or any one else, so they finally decided to send for him and ask his assistance.

The starling undertook to be the messenger, and as soon as the meeting was over he flew away upon his errand.

"What were all you folks talking about?" asked the crow, flying down and alighting upon a limb near to those who had not yet left the place of meeting.

"We were talking about you," said the thrush, boldly; "and you wouldn't care at all to know what we said, Mister Jim Crow."

Jim looked a trifle guilty and ashamed at hearing this, but knowing they were all afraid of him he burst out into a rude laugh.

"Caw! caw! caw!" he chuckled hoarsely; "what do I care what you say about me? But don't you get saucy, my pretty thrush, or your friends will miss you some fine morning, and never see you again."

This awful threat made them all silent, for they remembered the fate of poor Mrs. Linnet's children, and very few of the birds now had any doubt but that Jim Crow knew more about the death of those helpless little ones than he cared to tell.

Finding they would not talk with him, the crow flew back to his tree, where he sat sullenly perched upon a branch near his nest. And they were very glad to get rid of him so easily.