

Chapter V - Jim Crow Meets Policeman Blue Jay

NEXT morning Jim Crow woke up hungry, and as he sat lazily in his big nest, he remembered that he had seen four pretty brown eggs, speckled with white, in the nest of the oriole that lived at the edge of the forest.

"Those eggs will taste very good for breakfast," he thought. "I'll go at once and get them; and if old Mammy Oriole makes a fuss, I'll eat her, too."

He hopped out of his nest and on to a branch, and the first thing his sharp eye saw was a big and strange bird sitting upon the tree just opposite him and looking steadily in his direction.

Never having lived among other birds until now, the crow did not know what kind of bird this was, but as he faced the new-comer he had a sort of shiver in his heart that warned him to beware an enemy. Indeed, it was none other than the Blue Jay that had appeared so suddenly, and he had arrived that morning because the starling had told him of the thefts that had taken place, and the Blue Jay is well known as the policeman of the forest and a terror to all evil-doers.

In size he was nearly as big as Jim Crow himself, and he had a large crest of feathers on the top of his head that made him look even more fierce-- especially when he ruffled them up. His body was purplish blue color on the back and purplish gray below, and there was a collar of black feathers running all around his neck. But his wings and tail were a beautiful rich blue, as delightful in color as the sky on a fine May morning; so in personal appearance Policeman Blue Jay was much handsomer than Jim Crow. But it was the sharp, stout beak that most alarmed the crow, and had Jim been wiser he would have known that before him was the most deadly foe of his race, and that the greatest pleasure a Blue Jay finds in life is to fight with and punish a crow.

But Jim was not very wise; and so he imagined, after his first terror had passed away, that he could bully this bird as he had the others, and make it fear him.

"Well, what are you doing here?" he called out, in his crossest voice, for he was anxious to get away and rob the oriole's nest.

The Blue Jay gave a scornful, chattering laugh as he answered:

"That's none of your business, Jim Crow."

"Take care!" warned the crow; "you'll be sorry if you don't treat me with proper respect."

The Blue Jay winked solemnly, in a way that would have been very comical to any observer other than the angry crow.

"Don't hurt me--please don't!" he said, fluttering on the branch as if greatly frightened. "My mother would feel dreadful bad if anything happened to me."

"Well, then, behave yourself," returned the crow, strutting proudly along a limb and flopping his broad wings in an impressive manner. For he was foolish enough to think he had made the other afraid.

But no sooner had he taken flight and soared into the air than the Blue Jay darted at him like an arrow from a bow, and before Jim Crow could turn to defend himself the bill of his enemy struck him full in the breast. Then, with a shriek of shrill laughter, the policeman darted away and disappeared in the forest, leaving the crow to whirl around in the air once or twice and then sink slowly down, with some of his own torn feathers floating near him as witnesses to his defeat.

The attack had dazed and astonished him beyond measure; but he found he was not much hurt, after all. Crows are tougher than most birds. Jim managed to reach one of the brooks, where he bathed his breast in the cool water, and soon he felt much refreshed and more like his old self again.

But he decided not to go to the oriole's nest that morning, but to search for grubs and beetles amongst the mosses beneath the oak-trees.