

Chapter VI Jim Crow Fools the Policeman

FROM that time on Policeman Blue Jay made his home in the forest, keeping a sharp eye upon the actions of Jim Crow. And one day he flew away to the southward and returned with Mrs. Blue Jay, who was even more beautiful than her mate. Together they built a fine nest in a tree that stood near to the crow's tall pine, and soon after they had settled down to housekeeping Mrs. Blue Jay began to lay eggs of a pretty brown color mottled with darker brown specks.

Had Jim Crow known what was best for him he would have flown away from this forest and found himself a new home. Within a short flight were many bits of woodland where a crow might get a good living and not be bothered by blue jays. But Jim was obstinate and foolish, and had made up his mind that he never would again be happy until he had been revenged upon his enemy.

He dared no longer rob the nests so boldly as he had before, so he became sly and cunning. He soon found out that the Blue Jay could not fly as high as he could, nor as fast; so, if he kept a sharp lookout for the approach of his foe, he had no trouble in escaping. But if he went near to the nests of the smaller birds, there was the blue policeman standing guard, and ready and anxious to fight at a moment's notice. It was really no place for a robber at all, unless the robber was clever.

One day Jim Crow discovered a chalkpit among the rocks at the north of the forest, just beyond the edge of trees. The chalk was soft and in some places crumbled to a fine powder, so that when he had rolled himself for a few minutes in the dust all his feathers became as white as snow. This fact gave to Jim Crow a bright idea. No longer black, but white as a dove, he flew away to the forest and passed right by Policeman Blue Jay, who only noticed that a big white bird had flown amongst the trees, and did not suspect it was the thieving crow in a clever disguise.

Jim found a robin's nest that was not protected, both the robin and his wife being away in search of food. So he ate up the eggs and kicked the nest to pieces and then flew away again, passing the Blue Jay a second time all unnoticed.

When he reached a brook he washed all the chalk away from his feathers and then returned to his nest as black as ever.

All the birds were angry and dismayed when they found what had happened, but none could imagine who had robbed the robins. Mrs. Robin, who was not easily discouraged, built another nest and laid more eggs in it; but the next day a second nest in the forest was robbed, and then another and another, until the birds complained that Policeman Blue Jay did not protect them at all.

"I can't understand it in the least," said the policeman, "for I have watched carefully, and I know Jim Crow has never dared to come near to your trees."

"Then some one else is the robber," declared the thrush fussily.

"The only stranger I have noticed around here is a big white bird," replied the Blue Jay, "and white birds never rob nests or eat eggs, as you all know very well."

So they were no nearer the truth than before, and the thefts continued; for each day Jim Crow would make himself white in the chalk-pit, fly into the forest and destroy the precious eggs of some innocent little bird, and afterward wash himself in some far-away brook, and return to his nest chuckling with glee to think he had fooled the Blue Jay so nicely.

But the Blue Jay, although stupid and unsuspecting at first, presently began to get a little wisdom. He remembered that all this trouble had commenced when the strange white bird first arrived in the forest; and although it was doubtless true that white birds never eat eggs and have honest reputations, he decided to watch this stranger and make sure that it was innocent of the frightful crimes that had so aroused the dwellers in the forest.