Baum Lyman Frank

Policeman Bluejay

Лаймен Фрэнк Баум

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Баум Л.

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L. Frank Baum
Policeman Bluejay

[CHAPTER I]
Little Ones in Trouble

"SEEMS to me, Chub," said Twinkle, "that we're lost."

"Seems to me, Twink," said Chubbins, "that it isn't *we* that's lost. It's the path."

"It was here a minute ago," declared Twinkle.

"But it isn't here now," replied the boy.

"That's true," said the girl.

It really *was* queer. They had followed the straight path into the great forest, and had only stopped for a moment to sit down and rest, with the basket between them and their backs to a big tree. Twinkle winked just twice, because she usually took a nap in the afternoon, and Chubbins merely closed his eyes a second to find out if he could see that long streak of sunshine through his pink eyelids. Yet during this second, which happened while Twinkle was winking, the path had run away and left them without any guide or any notion which way they ought to go.

Another strange thing was that when they jumped up to look around them the nearest trees began sliding away, in a circle, leaving the little girl and boy in a clear space. And the trees continued moving back and back, farther and farther, until all their trunks were jammed tight together, and not even a mouse could have crept between them. They made a solid ring around Twinkle and Chubbins, who stood looking at this transformation with wondering eyes.

"It's a trap," said Chubbins; "and we're in it."

"It looks that way," replied Twinkle, thoughtfully. "Isn't it lucky, Chub, we have the basket with us? If it wasn't for that, we might starve to death in our prison."

"Oh, well," replied the little fellow, "the basket won't last long. There's plenty of starve in the bottom of it, Twinkle, any way you can fix it."

"That's so; unless we can get out. Whatever do you suppose made the trees behave that way, Chubbins?

"Don't know," said the boy.

Just then a queer creature dropped from a tree into the ring and began moving slowly toward them. It was flat in shape, like a big turtle; only it hadn't a turtle's hard shell. Instead, its body was covered with sharp prickers, like rose thorns, and it had two small red eyes that looked cruel and wicked. The children could not see how many legs it had, but they must have been very short, because the creature moved so slowly over the ground.

When it had drawn near to them it said, in a pleading tone that sounded soft and rather musical:

"Little girl, pick me up in your arms, and pet me!"

Twinkle shrank back.

"My! I couldn't *think* of doing such a thing," she answered.

Then the creature said:

"Little boy, please pick me up in your arms, and pet me!"

"Go 'way!" shouted Chubbins. "I wouldn't touch you for anything."

The creature turned its red eyes first upon one and then upon the other.

"Listen, my dears," it continued; "I was once a beautiful maiden, but a cruel tuxix transformed me into this awful shape, and so must I remain until some child willingly takes me in its arms and pets me. Then, and not till then, will I be restored to my proper form."

"Don't believe it! Don't believe it!" cried a high, clear voice, and both the boy and the girl looked quickly around to see who had spoken. But no one besides themselves was in sight, and they only noticed a thick branch of one of the trees slightly swaying its leaves.

"What is a tuxix?" asked Twinkle, who was beginning to feel sorry for the poor creature.

"It is a magician, a sorcerer, a wizard, and a witch all rolled into one," was the answer; "and you can imagine what a dreadful thing that would be."

"Be careful!" cried the clear voice, again. "It is the tuxix herself who is talking to you. Don't believe a word you hear!"

At this the red eyes of the creature flashed fire with anger, and it tried to turn its clumsy body around to find the speaker. Twinkle and Chubbins looked too, but only heard a flutter and a mocking laugh coming from the trees.

"If I get my eye on that bird, it will never speak again," exclaimed the creature, in a voice of fury very different from the sweet tones it had at first used; and perhaps it was this fact that induced the children to believe the warning was from a friend, and they would do well to heed it.

"Whether you are the tuxix or not," said Twinkle, "I never will touch you. You may be sure of that."

"Nor I," declared Chubbins, stoutly, as he came closer to the girl and grasped her hand in his own.

At this the horrid thing bristled all its sharp prickers in anger, and said:

"Then, if I cannot conquer you in one way, I will in another. Go, both of you, and join the bird that warned you, and live in the air and the trees until you repent your stubbornness and promise to become my slaves. The tuxix has spoken, and her magical powers are at work. Go!"

In an instant Twinkle saw Chubbins shoot through the air and disappear among the leaves of one of the tall trees. As he went he seemed to grow very small, and to change in shape.

"Wait!" she cried. "I'm coming, too!"

She was afraid of losing Chubbins, so she flew after him, feeling rather queer herself, and a moment after was safe in the tall tree, clinging with her toes to a branch and looking in amazement at the boy who sat beside her.

Chubbins had been transformed into a pretty little bird – all, that is, except his head, which was Chubbins' own head reduced in size to fit the bird body. It still had upon it the straw hat, which had also grown small in size, and the sight that met Twinkle's eyes was so funny that she laughed merrily, and her laugh was like the sweet warbling of a skylark.

Chubbins looked at her and saw almost what she saw; for Twinkle was a bird too, except for her head, with its checked sunbonnet, which had grown small enough to fit the pretty, glossy-feathered body of a lark.

Both of them had to cling fast to the branch with their toes, for their arms and hands were now wings. The toes were long and sharp pointed, so that they could be used in the place of fingers.

"My!" exclaimed Twinkle; "you're a queer sight, Chubbins!"

"So are you," answered the boy. "That mean old thing must have 'witched us."

"Yes, we're 'chanted," said Twinkle. "And now, what are we going to do about it? We can't go home, for our folks would be scared nearly into fits. And we don't know the way home, either."

"That's so," said Chubbins, fluttering his little wings to keep from falling, for he had nearly lost his balance.

"What shall we do?" she continued.

"Why, fly around and be gay and happy," said a clear and merry voice beside them. "That's what birds are expected to do!"

[CHAPTER II]
The Forest Guardian

Twinkle and Chubbins twisted their heads around on their little feathered necks and saw perched beside them a big bird of a most beautiful blue color. At first they were a bit frightened, for the newcomer seemed of giant size beside their little lark bodies, and he was, moreover, quite fierce in appearance, having a crest of feathers that came to a point above his head, and a strong beak and sharp talons. But Twinkle looked full into the shrewd, bright eye, and found it good humored and twinkling; so she plucked up courage and asked:

"Were you speaking to us?"

"Very likely," replied the blue bird, in a cheerful tone. "There's no one else around to speak to."

"And was it you who warned us against that dreadful creature below in the forest?" she continued.

"It was."

"Then," said Twinkle, "we are very much obliged to you."

"Don't mention it," said the other. "I'm the forest policeman – Policeman Bluejay, you know – and it's my duty to look after everyone who is in trouble."

"We're in trouble, all right," said Chubbins, sorrowfully.

"Well, it might have been worse," remarked Policeman Bluejay, making a chuckling sound in his throat that Twinkle thought was meant for a laugh. "If you had ever touched the old tuxix she would have transformed you into toads or lizards. That is an old trick of hers, to get children into her power and then change them into things as loathsome as herself."

"I wouldn't have touched her, anyhow," said Twinkle.

"Nor I!" cried Chubbins, in his shrill, bird-like voice. "She wasn't nice."

"Still, it was good of you to warn us," Twinkle added, sweetly.

The Bluejay looked upon the fluttering little things with kind approval. Then he laughed outright.

"What has happened to your heads?" he asked.

"Nothing, 'cept they're smaller," replied Chubbins.

"But birds shouldn't have human heads," retorted the bluejay. "I suppose the old tuxix did that so the birds would not admit you into their society, for you are neither all bird nor all human. But never mind; I'll explain your case, and you may be sure all the birds of the forest will be kind to you."

"Must we stay like this always?" asked Twinkle, anxiously.

"I really can't say," answered the policeman. "There is said to be a way to break every enchantment, if one knows what it is. The trouble in these cases is to discover what the charm may be that will restore you to your natural shapes. But just now you must make up your minds to live in our forest for a time, and to be as happy as you can under the circumstances."

"Well, we'll try," said Chubbins, with a sigh.

"That's right," exclaimed Policeman Bluejay, nodding his crest in approval. "The first thing you must have is a house; so, if you will fly with me, I will try to find you one."

"I – I'm afraid!" said Twinkle, nervously.

"The larks," declared the bluejay, "are almost the strongest and best flyers we have. You two children have now become skylarks, and may soar so high in the air that you can scarcely see the earth below you. For that reason you need have no fear whatever. Be bold and brave, and all will be well."

He spoke in such a kindly and confident voice that both Twinkle and Chubbins gained courage; and when the policeman added: "Come on!" and flew straight as an arrow into the air above the

tree-tops, the two little skylarks with their girl and boy heads followed swiftly after him, and had no trouble in going just as fast as their conductor.

It was quite a pleasant and interesting experience, to dart through the air and be in no danger of falling. When they rested on their outstretched wings they floated as lightly as bubbles, and soon a joyous thrill took possession of them and they began to understand why it is that the free, wild birds are always so happy in their native state.

The forest was everywhere under them, for it was of vast extent. Presently the bluejay swooped downward and alighted near the top of a tall maple tree that had many thick branches.

In a second Twinkle and Chubbins were beside him, their little hearts beating fast in their glossy bosoms from the excitement of their rapid flight. Just in front of them, firmly fastened to a crotch of a limb, was a neatly built nest of a gray color, lined inside with some soft substance that was as smooth as satin.

"Here," said their thoughtful friend, "is the nest that Niddie Thrush and Daisy Thrush built for themselves a year ago. They have now gone to live in a wood across the big river, so you are welcome to their old home. It is almost as good as new, and there is no rent to pay."

"It's awfully small!" said Chubbins.

"Chut-chut!" twittered Policeman Bluejay. "Remember you are not children now, but skylarks, and that this is a thrush's nest. Try it, and you are sure to find it will fit you exactly."

So Twinkle and Chubbins flew into the "house" and nestled their bodies against its soft lining and found that their friend was right. When they were cuddled together, with their slender legs tucked into the feathers of their breasts, they just filled the nest to the brim, and no more room was necessary.

"Now, I'll mark the nest for you, so that everyone will know you claim it," said the policeman; and with his bill he pecked a row of small dots in the bark of the limb, just beside the nest. "I hope you will be very happy here, and this afternoon I will bring some friends to meet you. So now good-bye until I see you again."

"Wait!" cried Chubbins. "What are we going to eat?"

"Eat!" answered the bluejay, as if surprised. "Why, you may feast upon all the good things the forest offers – grubs, beetles, worms, and butterfly-eggs."

"Ugh!" gasped Chubbins. "It makes me sick to just think of it."

"What!"

"You see," said Twinkle, "we are not *all* birds, Mr. Bluejay, as you are; and that makes a big difference. We have no bills to pick up the things that birds like to eat, and we do not care for the same sort of food, either."

"What *do* you care for?" asked the policeman, in a puzzled voice.

"Why, cake and sandwitches, and pickles, and cheese, such as we had in our basket. We couldn't *eat* any live things, you see, because we are not used to it."

The bluejay became thoughtful.

"I understand your objection," he said, "and perhaps you are right, not having good bird sense because the brains in your heads are still human brains. Let me see: what can I do to help you?"

The children did not speak, but watched him anxiously.

"Where did you leave your basket?" he finally asked.

"In the place where the old witch 'chanted us."

"Then," said the officer of the forest, "I must try to get it for you."

"It is too big and heavy for a bird to carry," suggested Twinkle.

"Sure enough. Of course. That's a fact." He turned his crested head upward, trying to think of a way, and saw a black speck moving across the sky.

"Wait a minute! I'll be back," he called, and darted upward like a flash.

The children watched him mount into the sky toward the black speck, and heard his voice crying out in sharp, quick notes. And before long Policeman Bluejay attracted the other bird's attention, causing it to pause in its flight and sink slowly downward until the two drew close together.

Then it was seen that the other bird was a great eagle, strong and sharp-eyed, and with broad wings that spread at least six feet from tip to tip.

"Good day, friend eagle," said the bluejay; "I hope you are in no hurry, for I want to ask you to do me a great favor."

"What is it?" asked the eagle, in a big, deep voice.

"Please go to a part of the forest with me and carry a basket to some friends of mine. I'll show you the way. It is too heavy for me to lift, but with your great strength you can do it easily."

"It will give me pleasure to so favor you," replied the eagle, politely; so Policeman Bluejay led the way and the eagle followed with such mighty strokes of its wings that the air was sent whirling in little eddies behind him, as the water is churned by a steamer's paddles.

It was not very long before they reached the clearing in the forest. The horrid tuxix had wriggled her evil body away, to soothe her disappointment by some other wicked act; but the basket stood as the children had left it.

The eagle seized the handle in his stout beak and found it was no trouble at all for him to fly into the air and carry the basket with him.

"This way, please – this way!" chirped the bluejay; and the eagle bore the precious burden safely to the maple tree, and hung it upon a limb just above the nest.

As he approached he made such a fierce fluttering that Twinkle and Chubbins were dreadfully scared and flew out of their nest, hopping from limb to limb until they were well out of the monstrous bird's way. But when they saw the basket, and realized the eagle's kindly act, they flew toward him and thanked him very earnestly for his assistance.

"Goodness me!" exclaimed the eagle, turning his head first on one side and then on the other, that both his bright eyes might observe the child-larks; "what curious creatures have you here, my good policeman?"

"Why, it is another trick of old Hautau, the tuxix. She found two children in the forest and enchanted them. She wanted to make them toads, but they wouldn't touch her, so she couldn't. Then she got herself into a fine rage and made the little dears half birds and half children, as you see them. I was in a tree near by, and saw the whole thing. Because I was sorry for the innocent victims I befriended them, and as this basket belongs to them I have asked you to fetch it to their nest."

"I am glad to be of service," replied the eagle. "If ever you need me, and I am anywhere around," he continued, addressing the larks, "just call me, and I will come at once."

"Thank you," said Twinkle, gratefully.

"We're much obliged," added Chubbins.

Then the eagle flew away, and when he was gone Policeman Bluejay also bade them good-bye.

"I'll be back this afternoon, without fail," he said. "Just now I must go and look over the forest, and make sure none of the birds have been in mischief during my absence. Do not go very far from your nest, for a time, or you may get lost. The forest is a big place; but when you are more used to it and to your new condition you can be more bold in venturing abroad."

"We won't leave this tree," promised Twinkle, in an earnest voice.

And Chubbins chimed in with, "That's right; we won't leave this tree until you come back."

"Good-bye," said the policeman.

"Good-bye," responded Twinkle and Chubbins.

So the bluejay darted away and was soon lost to sight, and Twinkle and Chubbins were left alone to seriously consider the great misfortune that had overtaken them.

[CHAPTER III]
The Child-Larks

"Folks will be worried about us, Twink," said Chubbins.

"'Course they will," Twinkle replied. "They'll wonder what has become of us, and try to find us."

"But they won't look in the tree-tops."

"No."

"Nor think to ask the birds where we are."

"Why should they?" enquired Twinkle. "They can't talk to the birds, Chub."

"Why not? We talk to them, don't we? And they talk to us. At least, the p'liceman and the eagle did."

"That's true," answered Twinkle, "and I don't understand it a bit. I must ask Mr. Bluejay to 'splain it to us."

"What's the use of a p'liceman in the forest?" asked Chubbins, after a moment's thought.

"I suppose," she replied, "that he has to keep the birds from being naughty. Some birds are just awful mischiefs, Chub. There's the magpies, you know, that steal; and the crows that fight; and the jackdaws that are saucy, and lots of others that get into trouble. Seems to me P'liceman Bluejay's a pretty busy bird, if he looks after things as he ought."

"Prob'ly he's got his hands full," said Chubbins.

"Not that; for he hasn't any hands, any more than we have. Perhaps you ought to say he's got his wings full," suggested Twinkle.

"That reminds me I'm hungry," chirped the boy-lark.

"Well, we've got the basket," she replied.

"But how can we eat cake and things, witched up as we are?"

"Haven't we mouths and teeth, just the same as ever?"

"Yes, but we haven't any hands, and there's a cloth tied over the top of the basket."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Twinkle; "I hadn't thought of that."

They flew together to the basket and perched upon the edge of it. It seemed astonishingly big to them, now that they were so small; but Chubbins remarked that this fact was a pleasant one, for instead of eating all the good things the basket contained at one meal, as they had at first intended, it would furnish them with food for many days to come.

But how to get into the basket was the thing to be considered just now. They fluttered around on every side of it, and finally found a small place where the cloth was loose. In a minute Chubbins began clawing at it with his little feet, and Twinkle helped him; so that gradually they managed to pull the cloth away far enough for one of them to crawl through the opening. Then the other followed, and because the big basket was not quite full there was exactly room for them to stand underneath the cloth and walk around on top of a row of cookies that lay next to a row of sandwiches.

The cookies seemed enormous. One was lying flat, and Chubbins declared it seemed as big around as the dining-table at home.

"All the better for us," said Twinkle, bending her head down to nibble at the edge of the cookie.

"If we're going to be birds," said Chubbins, who was also busily eating as best he could, "we ought to be reg'lar birds, and have bills to peck with. This being half one thing and half another doesn't suit me at all."

"The witch wasn't trying to suit us," replied Twinkle; "she was trying to get us into trouble."

"Well, she did it, all right," he said.

It was not so hard to eat as they had feared, for their slender necks enabled them to bend their heads low. Chubbins' hat fell off, a minute later, and he wondered how he was going to get it on his head again.

"Can't you stand on one foot, and use the other foot like a hand?" asked Twinkle.

"I don't know," said he.

"The storks stand on one leg," continued the girl. "I've seen 'em in pictures."

So Chubbins tried it, and found he could balance his little body on one leg very nicely. For if he toppled either way he had but to spread his wings and tail feathers and so keep himself from falling. He picked up his hat with the claws of his other foot and managed to put it on by ducking his head.

This gave the boy-lark a new idea. He broke off a piece of the cookie and held it in his claw while he ate it; and seeing his success Twinkle followed his example, and after a few attempts found she could eat very comfortably in that way.

Having had their luncheon – and it amazed Chubbins to see how very little was required to satisfy their hunger – the bird-children crept out of the basket and flew down to the twig beside their nest.

"Hello!" cried a strange voice. "Newcomers, eh?"

They were so startled that they fluttered a moment to keep from tumbling off the limb. Then Twinkle saw a furry red head sticking out of a small hollow in the trunk of the tree. The head had two round black eyes, an inquisitive nose, a wide mouth with sharp teeth and whiskers like those of a cat. It seemed as big as the moon to the shy little child-larks, until it occurred to the girl that the strange creature must be a squirrel.

"You – you scared us!" she said, timidly.

"You scared *me,* at first," returned the squirrel, in a comic tone. "Dear me! how came you birds to have children's heads?"

"That isn't the way to put it," remarked Chubbins, staring back into the eyes of the squirrel. "You should ask how we children happened to have birds' bodies."

"Very well; put the conundrum that way, if you like," said the squirrel. "What is the answer?"

"We are enchanted," replied Twinkle.

"Ah. The tuxix?"

"Yes. We were caught in the forest, and she bewitched us."

"That is too bad," said their new acquaintance. "She is a very wicked old creature, for a fact, and loves to get folks into trouble. Are you going to live here?"

"Yes," answered the girl. "Policeman Bluejay gave us this nest."

"Then it's all right; for Policeman Bluejay rules the feathered tribes of this forest about as he likes. Have you seen him in full uniform yet?"

"No," they replied, "unless his feathers are his uniform."

"Well, he's too proud of his office to be satisfied with feathers, I can tell you. When some folks get a little authority they want all the world to know about it, and a bold uniform covers many a faint heart. But as I'm your nearest neighbor I'll introduce myself. My name's Wisk."

"My name is Twinkle."

"And mine's Chubbins."

"Pleased to make your acquaintance," said the squirrel, nodding. "I live in the second flat."

"How's that?" asked the boy.

"Why, the second hollow, you know. There's a 'possum living in the hollow down below, who is carrying four babies around in her pocket; and Mrs. Hootaway, the gray owl, lives in the hollow above – the one you can see far over your heads. So I'm the second flat tenant."

"I see," said Twinkle.

"Early in the morning the 'possum comes growling home to go to bed; late at night the owl hoots and keeps folks awake; but I'm very quiet and well behaved, and you'll find me a good neighbor," continued Wisk.

"I'm sure of that," said Chubbins.

As if to prove his friendship the squirrel now darted out of the hollow and sat upon a limb beside the children, holding his bushy tail straight up so that it stood above his head like a big plume in a soldier's helmet.

"Are you hungry?" asked the girl.

"Not very. I cannot get much food until the nuts are ripe, you know, and my last winter's supply was gone long ago. But I manage to find some bits to eat, here and there."

"Do you like cookies?" she asked.

"I really do not know," answered Wisk. "Where do they grow?"

"In baskets. I'll get you a piece, and you can try it." So Twinkle flew up and crept into her basket again, quickly returning with a bit of cookie in her claw. It was not much more than a crumb, but nevertheless it was all that she could carry.

The squirrel seized the morsel in his paws, examined it gravely, and then took a nibble. An instant later it was gone.

"That is very good, indeed!" he declared. "Where do these baskets of cookies grow?"

"They don't grow anywhere," replied Twinkle, with a laugh. "The baskets come from the grocery store, and my mama makes the cookies."

"Oh; they're human food, then."

"Yes; would you like some more?"

"Not just now," said Wisk. "I don't want to rob you, and it is foolish to eat more than one needs, just because the food tastes good. But if I get very hungry, perhaps I'll ask you for another bite."

"Do," said the girl. "You are welcome to what we have, as long as it lasts."

"That is very kind of you," returned the squirrel.

They sat and talked for an hour, and Wisk told them stories of the forest, and of the many queer animals and birds that lived there. It was all very interesting to the children, and they listened eagerly until they heard a rushing sound in the air that sent Wisk scurrying back into his hole.

[CHAPTER IV]
An Afternoon Reception

Twinkle and Chubbins stretched their little necks to see what was coming, and a moment later beheld one of the most gorgeous sights the forest affords – a procession of all the bright-hued birds that live among the trees or seek them for shelter.

They flew in pairs, one after the other, and at the head of the procession was their good friend Policeman Bluejay, wearing a policeman's helmet upon his head and having a policeman's club tucked underneath his left wing. The helmet was black and glossy and had a big number "1" on the front of it, and a strap that passed under the wearer's bill and held it firmly in place. The club was fastened around the policeman's wing with a cord, so that it could not get away when he was flying.

The birds were of many sizes and of various colorings. Some were much larger than the bluejay, but none seemed so proud or masterful, and all deferred meekly to the commands of the acknowledged guardian of the forest.

One by one the pretty creatures alighted upon the limbs of the tree, and the first thing they all did was to arrange their feathers properly after their rapid flight. Then the bluejay, who sat next to the child-larks, proceeded to introduce the guests he had brought to call upon the newest inhabitants of his domain.

"This is Mr. and Mrs. Robin Redbreast, one of our most aristocratic families," said he, swinging his club around in a circle until Chubbins ducked his head for fear it might hit him.

"You are welcome to our forest," chirped Robin, in a sedate and dignified tone.

"And here is Mr. Goldfinch and his charming bride," continued the policeman.

"Ah, it is a pleasure to meet you," the goldfinch murmured, eyeing the child-larks curiously, but trying to be so polite that they would not notice his staring.

"Henny Wren and Jenny Wren," proceeded the policeman.

Twinkle and Chubbins both bowed politely.

"Well, well!" croaked a raven, in a hoarse voice, "am I to wait all day while you introduce those miserable little insignificant grub-eaters?"

"Be quiet!" cried Policeman Bluejay, sternly.

"I won't," snapped the raven.

It happened so quickly that the children saw nothing before they heard the thump of the club against the raven's head.

"Caw – waw – waw – waw! Murder! Help!" screamed the big bird, and flew away from the tree as swiftly as his ragged wings would carry him.

"Let him go," said a sweet brown mocking-bird. "The rowdy is always disturbing our social gatherings, and no one will miss him if he doesn't come back."

"He is not fit for polite society," added a nuthatcher, pruning her scarlet wings complacently.

So the policeman tucked the club under his wing again and proceeded with the introductions, the pewees and the linnets being next presented to the strangers, and then the comical little chicadees, the orioles, bobolinks, thrushes, starlings and whippoorwills, the latter appearing sleepy because, they explained, they had been out late the night before.

These smaller birds all sat in rows on the limbs beside Twinkle and Chubbins; but seated upon the stouter limbs facing them were rows of bigger birds who made the child-larks nervous by the sharp glances from their round, bright eyes. Here were blackbirds, cuckoos, magpies, grosbeaks and wood-pigeons, all nearly as big and fierce-looking as Policeman Bluejay himself, and some so rugged and strong that it seemed strange they would submit to the orders of the officer of the law. But the policeman kept a sharp watch upon these birds, to see that they attempted no mischievous pranks,

and they must have been afraid of him because they behaved very well after the saucy raven had left them. Even the chattering magpies tried to restrain their busy tongues, and the blackbirds indulged in no worse pranks than to suddenly spread their wings and try to push the pigeons off the branch.

Several beautiful humming-birds were poised in the air above this gathering, their bodies being motionless but their tiny wings fluttering so swiftly that neither Twinkle nor Chubbins could see them at all.

Policeman Bluejay, having finally introduced all the company to the child-larks, began to relate the story of their adventures, telling the birds how the wicked tuxix had transformed them into the remarkable shapes they now possessed.

"For the honor of our race," he said, "we must each and every one guard these little strangers carefully, and see that they come to no harm in our forest. You must all pledge yourselves to befriend them on all occasions, and if any one dares to break his promise he must fight with me to the death – and you know very well what that means."

"We do," said a magpie, with a shrill laugh. "You'll treat us as you did Jim Crow. Eh?"

The policeman did not notice this remark, but the other birds all looked grave and thoughtful, and began in turn to promise that they would take care to befriend the child-larks at all times. This ceremony having been completed, the birds began to converse in a more friendly and easy tone, so that Twinkle and Chubbins soon ceased to be afraid of them, and enjoyed very much their society and friendly chatter.

[CHAPTER V]
The Oriole's Story

"We are really very happy in this forest," said an oriole that sat next to Twinkle, "and we would have no fears at all did not the men with guns, who are called hunters, come here now and then to murder us. They are terribly wild and ferocious creatures, who have no hearts at all."

"Oh, they *must* have hearts," said Twinkle, "else they couldn't live. For one's heart has to beat to keep a person alive, you know."

"Perhaps it's their gizzards that beat," replied the oriole, reflectively, "for they are certainly heartless and very wicked. A cousin of mine, Susie Oriole, had a very brave and handsome husband. They built a pretty nest together and Susie laid four eggs in it that were so perfect that she was very proud of them.

"The eggs were nearly ready to hatch when a great man appeared in the forest and discovered Susie's nest. Her brave husband fought desperately to protect their home, but the cruel man shot him, and he fell to the ground dead. Even then Susie would not leave her pretty eggs, and when the man climbed the tree to get them she screamed and tried to peck out his eyes. Usually we orioles are very timid, you know; so you can well understand how terrified Susie was to fight against this giant foe. But he had a club in his hand, with which he dealt my poor cousin such a dreadful blow that she was sent whirling through the air and sank half unconscious into a bush a few yards away.

"After this the man stole the eggs from the nest, and also picked up the dead body of Susie's husband and carried it away with him. Susie recovered somewhat from the blow she had received, and when she saw her eggs and her poor dead husband being taken away, she managed to flutter along after the man and followed him until he came to the edge of the forest. There he had a horse tied to a tree, and he mounted upon the beast's back and rode away through the open country. Susie followed him, just far enough away to keep the man in sight, without being noticed herself.

"By and bye he came to a big house, which he entered, closing the door behind him. Susie flew into a tree beside the house and waited sorrowfully but in patience for a chance to find her precious ones again.

"The days passed drearily away, one after another, but in about a week my cousin noticed that one of the windows of the house had been left open. So she boldly left her tree and flew in at the window, and luckily none of the people who lived in the house happened to be in the room.

"Imagine Susie's surprise when she saw around the sides of the room many birds sitting silently upon limbs cut from trees, and among them her own husband, as proud and beautiful as he had ever been before the cruel man had killed him! She quickly flew to the limb and perched beside her loved one.

"'Oh, my darling!' she cried, 'how glad I am to have found you again, and to see you alive and well when I had mourned you as dead. Come with me at once, and we will return to our old home in the forest.'

"But the bird remained motionless and made no reply to her loving words. She thrust her bill beside his and tried to kiss him, but he did not respond to the caress and his body was stiff and cold.

"Then Susie uttered a cry of grief, and understood the truth. Her husband was indeed dead, but had been stuffed and mounted upon the limb to appear as he had in life. Small wires had been pushed through his legs to make his poor body stand up straight, and to Susie's horror she discovered that his eyes were only bits of glass! All the other birds in the room were stuffed in the same way. They looked as if they were alive, at the first glance; but each body was cold and every voice mute. They were mere mockeries of the beautiful birds that this heartless and cruel man had deprived of their joyous lives.

"Susie's loving heart was nearly bursting with pain as she slowly fluttered toward the open window by which she had entered. But on her way a new anguish overtook her, for she noticed a big glass case against the wall in which were arranged clusters of eggs stolen from birds of almost every kind. Yes; there were her own lovely eggs, scarcely an inch from her face, but separated from her by a stout glass that could not be broken, although she madly dashed her body against it again and again.

"Finally, realizing her helplessness, poor Susie left the room by the open window and flew back to the forest, where she told us all the terrible thing she had seen. No one was able to comfort her, for her loving heart was broken; and after that she would often fly away to the house to peer through the window at her eggs and her beautiful husband.

"One day she did not return, and after waiting for her nearly two weeks we sent the bluejay to see what had become of her. Our policeman found the house, and also found the window of the room open.

"He boldly entered, and discovered Susie and her husband sitting side by side upon the dried limb, their bodies both stiff and dead. The man had caught the poor wife at last, and the lovers were reunited in death.

"Also Policeman Bluejay found his grandfather's mummy in this room, and the stuffed mummies of many other friends he had known in the forest. So he was very sorrowful when he returned to us, and from that time we have feared the heartless men more than ever."

"It's a sad story," sighed Twinkle, "and I've no doubt it is a true one. But all men are not so bad, I'm sure."

"All men who enter the forest are," answered the oriole, positively. "For they only come here to murder and destroy those who are helpless before their power, but have never harmed them in the least. If God loves the birds, as I am sure He does, why do you suppose He made their ferocious enemies, the men?"

Twinkle did not reply, but she felt a little ashamed.

[CHAPTER VI]
A Merry Adventure

"Talking about men," said the cuckoo, in a harsh but not very unpleasant voice, "reminds me of a funny adventure I once had myself. I was sitting in my nest one day, at the time when I was quite young, when suddenly a man appeared before me. You must know that this nest, which was rather carelessly built by my mother, was in a thick evergreen tree, and not very high from the ground; so that I found the man's eyes staring squarely into my own.

"Most of you, my dears, have seen men; but this was the strangest sort of man you can imagine. There was white hair upon his face, so long that it hung down to his middle, and over his eyes were round plates of glass that glittered very curiously. I was so astonished at seeing the queer creature that I sat still and Stared, and this was my undoing. For suddenly there came a rapid 'whish!' through the air, and a network of cords fell all around and over me. Then, indeed, I spread my wings and attempted to fly; but it was too late. I struggled in the net without avail, and soon gave up the conflict in breathless despair.

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