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WANTED

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Birds of the Merry Forest

By LILIAN LEVERIDGE

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CHAPTER XIII.

Jack Crow's Story.

"MY home, as I have said, was on a beautiful little island in a great blue lake you couldn't see across, and unless your wings were good and strong you couldn't fly across it either. I had four little brothers, but alas! only one of them ever grew up, and we were separated for a long, long time. Our nest was in the top of a tall pine tree. We were happy together, and kept our mother busy feeding us.

"Our feathers were growing nicely, and mother had promised to begin the very next day to teach us to fly. But that awful night—Oh! I shall never, never forget it. The only wonder is that any of us lived to tell the tale.

"The evening before it was very warm. There wasn't a breath of wind to rock our cradle, and none of us felt sleepy. Mother sat beside the nest and we all watched the sun sink like a big ball of fire into the water. After it grew dark we went to sleep.

"We were awakened suddenly by a loud crashing noise and a long rumbling sound as if a whole lot of rocks were rolling down the big hill. There was a sudden blinding light, and that terrible noise kept right on. It was the first thunderstorm, and the worst, I have ever seen. The wind must have been furious about something, the way it shook our pine tree and tore at our nest.

"Mother was terrified. I knew by the way she trembled as she tried in vain to quiet us and keep our heads covered.

"At last the angry wind got its own way. Our nest was torn from the bough, and we found ourselves whirling dizzily through the air, while the whole world and the sky seemed to be on fire.

"Down, down we fell to the hard ground, where we lay, all dizzy and gasping for breath. Then the rain poured down in torrents and nearly drowned us. We shivered and cried in our thin clothing, and poor mother was nearly distracted trying to gather her scattered family together and shelter them. I thought that terrible night would never end.

"By morning three of my little brothers were dead. Only Sooty and mother and I saw the sun rise on our ruined home. As soon as it was light mother got us some breakfast, and we felt a little better.

"By and by the Boy Teacher came swinging along through the wet woods, whistling like a bobolink. We had never seen any person before, of course, and thought him a terrible monster.

He stopped when he saw us in such a pitiful plight. He picked up Sooty and me, and we thought that was the last of us for sure. Mother was terribly frightened, too, but she stayed close by and told us she would never leave us.

"The Teacher's hands were very soft and gentle, however, and his eyes and voice were kind. 'Poor little fellows!' he said. 'You've had a tough night of it, and no mistake. I've a good mind to adopt one of you.' 'So he left Sooty with mother. He would have liked to take us both, but he knew mother would fret if she were left without a single child to care for. He took me to his room, where he made me a nice comfortable

nest. It was a nice, bright room, with blossoming plants in the window, and all sorts of queer things around, and I felt at home there in no time. He didn't shut me up in a little prison like some boys do, but gave me plenty of room and let me do pretty much as I liked.

"He brought me lots of fish worms and other dainties, and he got Mattie, the fat girl who did the work, to feed me whenever he was away. He used to talk to me and play with me, and take me out on the lawn, and soon we were the best of friends. I never was the least bit afraid of him. I learned to fly before long, but mother and Sooty had disappeared, and I didn't want to leave my only friend.

"Every morning the Teacher went to school. Often I used to go with him, riding on his shoulder part of the way and making little excursions into the trees now and then; and I would always go to meet him after four o'clock, and we went home together.

"I used to sit in one of the shade trees near the school window sometimes and listen to my friend teaching the boys and girls. He was wonderfully wise. I learned a lot of interesting things, but he himself was more interesting to me than anything he talked about. The children all loved him—they couldn't help it—but they knew they had to mind him, and they did it without any fuss.

"He knew all about birds, and I've looked over his shoulder when he was reading a little book he called a 'Bird Key.' That's how I came to know there was one. He knew the flowers all by their names, too.

"There were a lot of men in the house where the Teacher and I boarded, but he was different from all the rest—as different as a blue-bell is from a thistle.

"I used to have a lot of fun there, playing tricks on them all. All sorts of things were left lying around indoors and out—spectacles, thimbles, spoons, spools, skeins of wool and silk, rings, brooches, handkerchiefs, and a hundred more odds and ends that people seem to need. I used to carry things off and hide them when the folks weren't looking, and laugh to see them hunt and fuss.

"One day all this came to a sudden end. I'd been having an extra good time. In the morning after Mattie had just put nice clean sheets on all the beds. I managed to upset an ink bottle on her table. So I dabbled my feet in it, and then, using them for a pen, did some beautiful writing on those white beds, just like the boys do in their copy books. I was really quite proud of myself, for the Teacher himself couldn't have done it any better.

"But for some reason, Mattie didn't approve, and she scolded at me till she was red in the face. I didn't care. I just sat up on an apple tree bough and made fun of her.

"A few days before this, a man they called Tom, that Mattie seemed very fond of, had given her a gold ring with a shiny stone in it. I saw him do it, and saw him kiss her, too; and she was as mad as anything because I laughed at them. She was proud of that little toy, I can tell you, and used to wear it on her finger all the time.

"That afternoon, however, she took it off to wash her hands, and I grabbed it. She saw me fly out of the window with it, and sent a hair

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brush after me—of course it didn't come near me. I flew up into the maple tree and hung the ring on a twig, where it glittered and sparkled beautifully in the sun, and looked much prettier than on Mattie's coarse red hands.

"Mattie flew into a temper and said things I wouldn't like to repeat. When Tom came in half an hour later she told him he'd have to catch that bird and wring its neck or she would have nothing more to do with him.

"I had gone into the pantry, where I was helping myself to a lemon tart and some huckleberry jam, and if that Tom didn't open the door and walk right in on me! I tried to get away, but it was no use. He caught me and carried me out behind the barn.

"I was good and scared by this time. I cried and begged him not to hurt me, but saw that he was determined to put an end to me. I can't describe to you how bad I felt. I



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