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Birds of the Merry Forest

By LILIAN LEVERIDGE

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CHAPTER XI.

Two Little Bluebirds.

At last there dawned a long-to-be-remembered day—the birthday of the twins. It was a perfectly lovely morning, all sunshine and sweetness and music, and the children awoke very early.

"Oh!" cried Boy Blue the moment his eyes were open; and "Oh!" echoed Dimple.

"Don't say a word, Dimple," called Boy Blue. "Hurry and dress. I want to see what kind of a bird you're going to be."

Dimple's happy silvery laugh floated out of the window where a gay little group of birds were singing their birthday greetings and waiting for a glimpse of their little friends.

Very soon there was a rush of eager feet to Boy Blue's window, and at sight of each other they clapped their hands and laughed.

"We're both Bluebirds!" cried Dimple. "Isn't that lovely?"

This was the secret—at least one secret—the Bluebirds had sung about. Through the open window they had seen Mother sewing at two little birthday outfits just the colour of their own lovely suits. Dimple dress and Boy Blue's suit had each a bow of old rose to match the birds' rosy breasts, and they each had a hat made of the same strong material beautifully stitched, Dimple's with a wide shady brim and a bewitching bow of rose tied under her chin.

The twins were delighted, and so were the birds when they showed themselves at the window.

"Let's hurry down and show Mother and thank her," said Boy Blue when they had admired each other and talked to the Bluebirds and Robins and Sparrows a while.

"We haven't said our prayers yet," Dimple reminded him.

"So we haven't. Let's say them here by the window."

"Suppose we just sing them like the birds do," suggested Dimple.

Boy Blue agreed, and kneeling by the window with clasped hands they sang softly their morning hymn of praise and prayer, to the sweetly warbled accompaniment of the birds' orchestra.

Then with waving arms and dancing feet they went singing downstairs to the breakfast room. Loving birthday greetings awaited them there—but that wasn't all. They hadn't thought of any more presents, yet on each plate was discovered a brown paper parcel, marked "For two little Bluebirds, from Daddy." This showed that the gifts were to be shared by both.

"Open yours first, Dimple," said Boy Blue excitedly.

Inside the wrappings Dimple found a little brown book with a picture of a bird on the cover. She opened it eagerly, and lo! on every page was a bird in all its lovely colours, with its name and some brief, interesting facts about it.

"It's the Bird Key!" cried Boy Blue, with a whoop of joy.

"That's just what it is!" replied Dimple. "Now we can find out the names of the birds, and they'll all talk to us. Won't it be lovely?"

In sheer joyousness of heart they caught each other's hands and danced around the room, while Mother and Daddy laughed with pleasure at the sight of their happiness. But pre-

sently Mother said: "You are forgetting Daddy's other gift, aren't you, son?"

In an instant Boy Blue seized upon the other package, which was considerably larger, and hastily removed the wrappers. Inside was a black leather case, and inside the case—what? Dimple didn't know, neither did Boy Blue. It was a funny looking object with two big glass eyes at one end and two smaller ones at the other.

"What is it, Daddy?" Boy Blue asked.

Daddy laughed. "I'll tell you; it's a pair of eyes to work in partnership with your own. They are called field glasses. Let me show you how to use them."

He took the glasses, screwed up the lens, and beckoned the children to the open door. "Look," he said: "Can you see a bird away over there on the line fence?"

They both saw the bird, and also heard his clear, piping song ringing across the fields, but could not tell what kind of bird it was.

Daddy put the little instrument up to his eyes and in a few moments handed it to Boy Blue, telling him to do the same and have a look at the bird.

The boy did so, and then exclaimed excitedly: "O Daddy! O Dimple! I can see it as plain as plain, and it looks so near. I can see its mouth opening as it sings."

"What does it look like?" asked Dimple.

"It's quite a big bird, bigger than a Robin. It has a bright yellow breast, with a wide black V-shaped collar. Oh! There's another just flew up close to it. This one is facing the other way and I can see its back and wings and tail better; they are a sort of streaky brownish colour. You look now, Dimple."

Dimple took the glass eagerly, and in a moment or two she, too, was exclaiming over the wonderful new birds. "I've heard that lovely song lots of times," she said, "but never could get near enough to have a good look at the bird. Do you know its name, Daddy?"

"Suppose you find out," he answered, with a twinkle of his eyes.

"The key! the key!" they cried. Dimple hastily placed the glass in her mother's hands and ran back into the room. For a few minutes the brown head and the golden were bent together over the little book.

"There it is! There it is!" cried Boy Blue.

"The very one!" replied Dimple.

"What's its name?"

"Meadowlark," Boy Blue read on the page. "Isn't that lovely?"

Dimple clapped her hands and went dancing around the room again. "Now," she said, "we'll be able to find out all the new birds' names, and we'll learn their songs, and they'll talk to us. They'll soon all get to know the two big Bluebirds without wings, and we'll learn all the secrets of the Merry Forest. O Mumsie! There's so much happiness inside of me I can't hold it in."

She flew into her mother's outstretched arms, while Daddy perched Boy Blue on his shoulder and went skipping like a big boy down the garden path.

"Don't keep your happiness in, darling," Mother whispered. "Let it overflow like the Meadowlark's song. There's lost of sadness in the world, but a happy thought and a loving

word and a cheery laugh or song, have little spirit wings and they fly—no one knows how far, and only the angels know the joy they carry."

"That's beautiful, Mother-My-Love," replied Dimple nestling her glowing, wild-rose face against her mother's cheek. "I'll always try to remember."

"The Bluebird is a symbol, or sign, of happiness," Mrs. Marlowe went on, "and I want you both to be my true little Bluebirds, and remember that the best and only way to keep happiness is to give it away to others."

Dimple laughed softly. "That sounds funny, but I know it's true. Will you tell Boy Blue what you told me, Mumsie?"

"Of course I will. And now, my love, run and call those two runaways in to breakfast."

The twins were too excited to eat much, and Mother said with a twinkle in her eyes: "I plainly foresee a raid on biscuits and milk about the middle of the morning. Run away now and come back again when you've found your appetites."

The children were glad of the permission. There was so much to do that it seemed a pity to lose a minute.

"First of all," said Boy Blue as they carried their treasures off to their own little domain, "let's find out about the bird with the golden crown, and those others that wouldn't talk to us."

The key unlocked the secret for them very easily and quickly.

"There it is," said Dimple, "that's the very one."



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