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Birds of the Merry Forest

By LILIAN LEVERIDGE

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CHAPTER X.

The Quest.

BOY BLUE looked at Dimple, and Dimple, looked at Boy Blue. "Seems to me," said Dimple, "this is a game of Cross Questions and Crooked Answers."

"It just looks as if those birds were making fun of us," Boy Blue answered, "but all the same, I don't believe they are."

"No, there's a key somewhere," said Dimple, "and we've got to find it. It's somewhere in the Merry Forest, but O my! what a big place the Merry Forest is! We can see miles and miles of it from here, and Daddy says there's miles and miles more of it we can't see."

"Boy Blue's eyes wandered for a minute over the wide golden-brown and green and blue landscape. Then he said thoughtfully, "The birds wouldn't ask us to find it if it was in some place we couldn't ever get at. They must have hid it somewhere not very far away where they know we go."

To this Dimple agreed, and for a few long minutes they sat on the rock with their chins in their hands, trying to think out some good plan of finding the key.

At last Dimple said, "We haven't been to see if there's any Hepaticas yet. They always grow down on the south side of the hill, and there must be some, for they couldn't stay asleep with this lovely warm sun smiling on them."

"Yes," Boy Blue added, "and the rain-drops running down their necks and tickling them under the chin—Oh! they must be awake by this time. Let's go and look."

"Maybe we'll find the bird key somewhere around there," suggested Dimple as they started down the green grassy hill. And a pretty spot it was, dotted with oak saplings, and May apple, and moose wood covered with little yellow blossoms.

They found the Hepaticas all right, lots of them, with their furry hoods turned back and their dainty faces, blue and pink and white, smiling up at the sun.

"O you dear, dear flowers, I just love you!" whispered Dimple softly as she bent her curly head low down to breathe their faint, sweet perfume.

"I wish they could talk to us like the birds do," said Boy Blue. "So do I," replied Dimple, "but I know they love us; they just look as if they did."

"I hope it doesn't hurt them to be picked," Boy Blue said, "cause I want some for Mother."

"I don't believe they mind when they know we love them," said Dimple. "But why couldn't we each take up a whole plant, with lots of earth around the roots, and plant it in our garden? They would live longer, and we could see them every day."

"Good idea!" cried Boy Blue, "Just fine! We'll do it right now. I wish we had something to dig with, but I guess this earth is nice and soft."

They chose the very nicest plants, one of each colour, dug them up very carefully and wrapped them up in the paper that had contained their lunch. They caught a gleam of blue on another sunny bank, and a gleam of pink and white on another; so they went on and on, quite forgetful of time and distance and direction.

At last Boy Blue said, "I'm getting kind of tired, aren't you, Dimple?"

"Yes, I am," she replied, "I guess we'd better start for home. And we haven't found the key, after all."

They turned and set off through the sunny woods, and walked on and on, keeping a look-out for that magic key. The woods seemed very quiet. They saw a few birds, but none they knew. Two birds began to sing very sweetly, answering each other across a little valley, but the songs were either without words or in a language they did not understand.

"Maybe we'd understand it," panted Boy Blue, "if we only had the key." He was getting very tired.

At last to their great joy they heard a song they knew by heart:

"Sing me a song of the Springtime, Merrily, merrily, merrily! Bud time, blossom time, wing time—Cheerily, cheerily, cheerily!"

"It's our own dear Robins," cried Dimple. And so it was.

The next minute they saw in the tree-tops a flash of brown wings and red breasts. "Hello, little strays—aways!" called Sir Robin, "What are you doing here?"

"We're going home," answered Boy Blue, "but it seems a long way. I'm glad you came."

"Going home, are you?" said Sir Robin. "It'll be a long, long way home by the direction you are going. You just turn right around and follow Lady Robin and me."

"But that isn't the way home!" the twins cried in a breath.

"See here," said Sir Robin firmly, "Don't you think we know our way about these woods?"

"O yes!" they answered. "Well," said Lady Robin, "Do you think we'd fool you and lead you wrong?"

"O no!" the twins answered, "You wouldn't do that."

"Well then," the birds said, "just come right on and don't waste any more time. Your mother is getting uneasy about you, and she sent us to find you."

The children were puzzled, but they turned and followed their bird guides without any more argument. As they stopped to rest a few minutes Boy Blue said, "We hoped we might find the key, but we haven't come across it yet."

"What key?" asked Sir Robin. "The bird key—to tell us the names of the birds we don't know."

"Who told you about that key?" "Jack Crow."

Sir Robin shook his head gravely. "He knows a lot, that bird," he said, "but he keeps it dark, and if he weren't so full of fool tricks I'd like him better. If we Robins could help you out we would, but we can't. We've heard of a bird key that people use—it isn't a thing we ever need. But don't worry about the key. I shouldn't wonder if your Mother or Daddy could help you find it."

"Very likely they could," said Boy Blue brightening. "We'll ask them anyway. Let's go on again. I'm rested now."

In a short time they came out on the homeward path and a few more minutes found them safe at home.

Mother was waiting for them at the garden gate, and shading her eyes from the sinking sun. "Here you are at last!" she said. "What has kept you so late? I've been looking for you the last hour or more, and was beginning to be afraid you were lost."

"I guess we were lost too," said Dimple, "only the Robins found us and brought us home. They said you sent them after us. Did you, Mother?"

Their mother looked a little startled and surprised. She turned



to Daddy who had just come out, and explained:

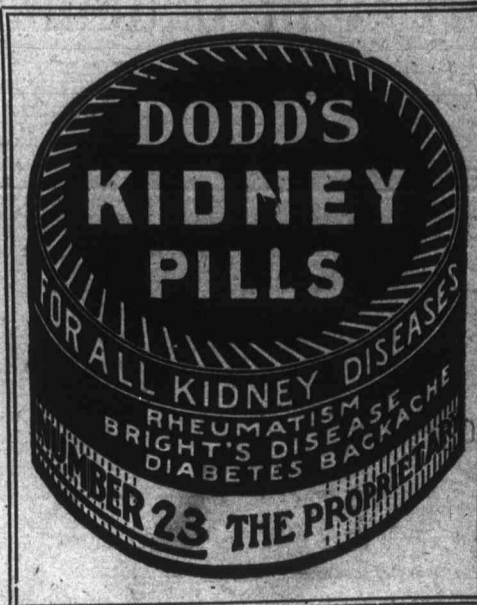
"I did say to the Robins, 'I wish you birds would go and find your little friends and bring them home,' but I never thought they would understand me."

Daddy smiled and shook his head in a puzzled way. "I've often heard of little birds telling secrets," he said, "I took it as a joke, but there must be some truth in it after all. And wasn't it that wise King Solomon who said, 'A bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter'? It seems to me we can't be too careful what we talk about before those birds."

"Let's say as many real nice things as we can when there are any birds around," suggested Dimple. "Maybe they'll pass them on and make the world happier."

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