

BIRDS OF THE MERRY FOREST

By **LILIAN LEVERIDGE**

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CHAPTER XXV. (Continued.)

"Follow the Gleam."

Dimple had always shared his adventures before, and he hesitated a little while, undecided whether to waken her or not. "No," he said to himself at length, "it wouldn't do to wake her up in the night like that; and besides, this is going to be a boy's adventure. Dimple might get frightened and coax me not to go, or follow me, perhaps, shaking in her shoes all the time. No; I'll go alone."

He dressed quietly and crept softly down the stairs, carrying his shoes and stockings, which he put on outside.

As he stood a moment, wondering which firefly to follow, a particularly bright one flashed right past his face. "All right, little firefly," he said, softly. "Lead on, and I'll follow the gleam of your lantern wherever you want to go."

Through the pansies and the mignonette, over the fence and into the deserted garden, across the meadow, and right into the Merry Forest that firefly went.

Leisurely it floated along, giving the boy plenty of time to drink in with every sense the delicious sweetness of the night until his soul was all athrill. His heart began to beat very fast as he entered the wood, all full of silvery moonlight and dark, velvet shadows. There was just a spice of danger in this enterprise, enough to make him at the same time both glad and sorry that he was alone. It was a strange, mixed feeling that was altogether new; it made his very fingertips tingle and the most delightful little shivers run up and down his back.

Yet he did not feel really lonely. There must be a great many of his friends, the birds, close around him, though, of course, they were all asleep. There might be bears and wildcats peering at him from behind those sombre tree-trunks, but he told himself with an uncertain little laugh that he didn't care if there were.

Down Elm Avenue and along the bank of the Winding River flashed the little firefly lantern, and near the bridge it crossed over. Oh! for wings to float so lightly in the air! But the bridge carried the boy across just as safely, if not so easily.

Then over the hill, where sweet clover and wild bergamot grew, went the two adventurers. It was a zigzag, winding way they took, and the boy was getting quite tired with the effort to keep up.

At last the firefly disappeared over the hill when Boy Blue was only half-way up, and when he reached the top, panting and breathless, there was no little lantern to be seen.

He waited quite a while, thinking his little, winged leader would perhaps miss him and come back. But no; it had evidently grown tired of the game.

"Well, I guess I'll go home, too," said the boy to himself. "I'm good and tired."

So he plunged down into the valley again and wearily climbed the opposite hill in the direction he thought home was. The valley seemed much wider than he had thought, and when at last he had climbed the height he was startled to find himself in a strange place where he had never been before.

With that discovery came the certainty that he was lost. He hadn't the ghost of an idea which way to turn next, and was too tired to go any further anyway. With that little, lost leader the adventure had suddenly lost its magic and the night its glory.

Boy Blue sank with a little, despairing sob into the grass under an oak tree and cried himself to sleep.

He had been sleeping for some time when he was awakened by the hoot of an Owl in a nearby tree. He rubbed his eyes, and for a minute wondered where he was and how he came to be there instead of in bed. Then he remembered.

He sat up and looked around. The hill and valley were still glimmering in the moonlight, and the warm air was sweet with the scent of balm of Gilead blown up in delicious whiffs from the valley. He felt rested, and not so lonesome as he had been, for the Owl, which he could see quite plainly, was better company than none.

"It is a Long-Eared Owl," he said to himself, observing its upright ear-tufts about an inch long, and its funny yellowish round face. "I wonder if it's the same one Daddy pointed out to us the other day. I wish it would hoot again."

It did hoot at that very minute, and was immediately answered by a loud voice from the valley, "Whoo-who-who, who-who-to-who-ah!" And following the voice came the bird—a big brown and white barred Hoot Owl, with big round eyes.

"My! that's a fine bird!" said Boy Blue to himself as the newcomer perched on a beech tree very close to the other. It was indeed a fine bird, and must have been fully twenty inches long from its smooth round head to its smooth round tail. The boy observed that this bird had no ear-tufts, and its face was quite different. He was just wishing he could take a picture of the two birds in the moonlight, when the big fellow began to talk.

"Haloo!" he said in a slow, deep voice, "Have you heard the news, Long-Ears?"

"What news, Moonwinks?" asked Long-Ears, "I have heard nothing worth mentioning."

"Oh! Is that so? When did you last see Puss, the Great Horned Owl?"

"I haven't seen him for a week or more," answered Long-Ears. "He must be away somewhere, and I hope he'll stay away. I don't know of anyone we would spare more easily."

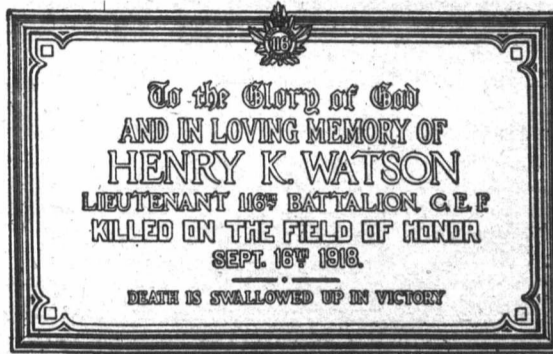
"Right you are! I'm with you there," returned Moonwinks, "but you speak as if you had a particular grievance. Have you?"

"Yes, I have. The very last time I saw him he had just killed my dear little friend, Veery, the Thrush, who used to sing so sweetly in the evenings."

(To Be Continued)

SMOKING.

Some interesting experiments have been made recently to prove the bad effects even of moderate smoking on athletes. It was found that a baseball pitcher after smoking one cigar lost 12 per cent. in accuracy, and 14 per cent. after smoking two cigars. In shooting at a target riflemen lost 4 per cent. in their score from smoking one cigar and 6 per cent. after smoking two cigars. Bicycle riders after smoking one cigar or three cigarettes lost 9 per cent. endurance and increased their heartbeats ten per minute. Similar tests with fencers showed a serious loss in precision in lunging with a fencing foil at a target after smoking two cigars. All these athletes gained in accuracy and endurance when they did not smoke. —Boys' Life.



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