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BIRDS OF THE MERRY FOREST

By LILIAN LEVERIDGE

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CHAPTER XIX.—(Continued.)

And Boy Blue's faith was rewarded. Suddenly, one of the birds perched on the topmost twig of the cherry tree, ruffled his feathers, lifted his head, and swelled his little throat with one thrillingly sweet strain. It was the same exquisite music to which they had been listening the last fifteen minutes, the song whose source they had tried so many times before to trace.

"Isn't it wonderful," whispered Dimple, tightly clasping Boy Blue's hand, which he had half unconsciously reached out to her. "Isn't it wonderful that he should come right here and sing to us that way?"

"Yes," Boy Blue answered softly, "and isn't it lovely that the bird and the song should belong to each other after all?"

"If that's the Whitethroat," said Jimmie, "I know some verses about it—learned them off just the other day."

"O Jimmie," cried the twins in one voice. "Do please say them for us." And then Jimmie repeated slowly and clearly these sweet lines:—

"Shy bird of the silver arrows of song, That cleave our Northern air so clear,

Thy notes prolong, prolong, I listen, I hear:

"I—love—dear—Canada, Canada, Canada."

O plumes of the pointed dusky fir, Screen of a swelling patriot heart, The copse is all astir, And echoes thy part. . . ."

Here Jimmie paused a moment, while the bird in its own lovely way supplied the chorus:—

"I—love—dear—Canada, Canada, Canada."

Jimmie's voice went on:—

"Now willowy reeds tune their silver flutes

As the noise of the day dies down; And silence strings her lutes The Whitethroat to crown. . . ."

Again the bird filled in the pause; and then Jimmie went on:—

"O bird of the silver arrows of song, Shy poet of Canada dear, Thy notes prolong, prolong, We listen, we hear:

"I—love—dear—Canada, Canada, Canada."

The clear, sweet voices of the twins joined the bird in that last chorus; and when the poem was ended they were almost too happy to speak.

Boy Blue drew a long breath. "That must have been one of the lovely things the Wood Thrush sang about this morning," he said.

"Yes," agreed Dimple, "and it was really just around the turn of the road, too. I wonder what there'll be around the next turn."

"Well, there's one thing sure," put in Jimmie. "If we don't soon make another start and keep going, we won't get to the lake before dinner time."

"Why, the sun is getting quite high," exclaimed Dimple, "and I'm beginning to feel curious about what Mother has put in our lunch basket. Let's be going on."

The remainder of the way to the lake was traversed without adventure. A few familiar birds were added to their lists, but no new discoveries made. They walked steadily, and the twins were quite tired by the time they reached the lake.

Lonely Lake was a wild and lovely spot. The lake itself was a clear tur-

quoise jewel in a deep emerald setting amid the hills. The farther slopes were covered with hardwood forest, with here and there a dense jungle of wild berry bushes and trailing vines. On the near shore were flat or nicely rounded grey rocks where one could stand and fish, or sit still and just enjoy the wildness and solitude. The trees here were mostly pines, in whose dark, fragrant boughs the wind loved to play strange, weird music. Beneath in the springy bog, composed of a thickly matted network of rootlets, padded with fallen leaves and rich leaf mould, some rare and lovely flowers grew—in the early spring the pearly pink arbutus, and later, painted trilliums, pitcher plants, pyrola, wild roses, pink laurel and other aromatic shrubs and plants for which the children had no names. The laurel was out now in all its glory, and a few wild roses were opening their delicately tinted petals to the sweet air.

The children admired everything, their hearts, eyes and voices overflowing with happiness. Then they sat for a welcome rest on the big, grey rocks beside the water, and opened their lunch baskets.

What a spread they had—slices of white bread and butter, roast chicken, sandwiches, apple turnovers, peach pie, various kinds of cake, and some oranges and candy. There was plenty of everything, enough for a bit of refreshment on the way home, and a treat of cake crumbs for the birds.

The crumbs were spread on a rock a few yards away, and were shared by a Junco, a Wren, a Bluebird and a Chickadee.

The Bluebird, having satisfied his hunger, flew to a low juniper bush close to Dimple and began to sing, keeping an interested but not a fearful eye on the little group all the time.

"Isn't it tame?" said Jimmie. "It seems almost to know you, Dimple."

"I believe it does," she replied. "I believe it is the very same one that sings so often in the apple tree by our window. Aren't you our own dear little friend?" she asked, addressing the bird.

The Bluebird winked its wings, then looked over at Jimmie, but kept silent.

How true and faithful a friend that same little Bluebird was, the children were to prove before they were many hours older. As they sat there, at rest and at peace, and happy-hearted, beside the shimmering blue lake, they little dreamed of the difficult and dangerous bit of road that awaited their pilgrim feet just around the next turn.

Did the Bluebird know? Who can tell?

(To be Continued.)

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