SAUNDERS MARSHALL

GOLDEN DICKY, THE STORY OF A CANARY AND HIS FRIENDS

Marshall Saunders

Golden Dicky, The Story of a Canary and His Friends

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=35006281
Golden Dicky, The Story of a Canary and His Friends:

Содержание

Marshall Saunders
Golden Dicky, The Story of a Canary and His Friends

"For I am my brother's keeper
And I will fight his fight;
And speak the word for beast and bird
Till the world shall set things right."

—Ella Wheeler Wilcox

INTRODUCTION

KNOWN the world over as the champion of the dumb animals, to which her lively imagination has given human speech, Marshall Saunders, the author of "Beautiful Joe," a book translated into many languages, has enlarged her range of humanitarian interests to take the feathered world into her protecting care. A new story of hers, entitled "Golden Dicky, the Story of a Canary and His Friends," presents a moving plea, not only in behalf of those prime favorites of the household, the canaries, but of other birds as well, even the too much despised sparrow coming in for anything but half-hearted defence. While one may feel that his imagination must take to itself powerful pinions to follow the story, particularly in the dialogues, yet at the same time he is made aware of how largely the practical enters into it. Miss Saunders has made a careful study of animal and bird life, and introduces into her pages much interesting information of the ways and the needs of her humble protégés, and many useful hints as to their proper care, so that the story is something more than entertaining.

While Dicky-Dick's chronicles mainly concern the familiar feathered folk of our homes and their leafy environment, the author cannot forego an excursion into her old haunts, and in Billie Sundae, the fox-terrier, a capital new chapter is added to the literature of dog biography and autobiography. The squirrels

also come in for a share of attention. Squirrie, the bad squirrel, supplies a proper villain to the cast of characters, with the sensible and good Chickari to redeem his race from opprobrium.

The children who read these delightful pages will surely form lasting friendships with Dicky-Dick, the cheery songster, and Chummy, the stout-hearted little sparrow, and all the robins and grackles and crows who with the dogs and squirrels and Nella, the monkey, make up the lively company embraced in these chronicles. In Mrs. Martin, the kind-hearted lover and protector of birds, and her gentle daughter, "Our Mary," we have illustrated the kindly relations which should obtain between man and the beasts of the field and the fowl of the air, over which the Creator has given him the responsibility of dominion.

Edward S. Caswell.

CHAPTER I
I BEGIN THE STORY OF MY LIFE

WHEN I look in a mirror and see my tiny, bright black eyes, it seems queer to think that once upon a time, when I was a baby bird, I was more blind than a bat.

My sense of sight was the last to wake up. I could hear, smell, taste and touch, before I could see. We were three naked little canary babies in a nest, and at intervals, we all rose up, threw back our heads, opened our beaks, and our mother Dixie daintily put the lovely egg food down our tiny throats. Oh, how good it used to taste! I never had enough, and yet I did have enough, for my mother knew how much to feed me, and when I got older, I understood that most young things would stuff themselves to death, if the old ones did not watch them.

I shall never forget the first day my eyes opened. I couldn't see things properly for hours. There was a golden mist or cloud always before me. That was my mother's beautiful yellow breast, for she hovered closely over us, to keep us warm. Then I was conscious of eyes, bright black ones, like my own. My mother was looking us all over affectionately, to see that we were well-fed, warm and clean, for canary housekeepers are just like human beings. Some are careful and orderly, others are careless and neglectful.

Then my father would come and stare at us. He is a handsome Norwich canary, of a deep gold color, with a beautiful crest that hangs over his eyes, and partly obscures his sight, making him look like a little terrier dog. He used to fling up this crest and look at us from under it. Then he would say, "Very fine babies, quite plump this lot," and he would fly away for more lettuce or egg food, or crushed hemp, for we had enormous appetites, and it took a great deal of his time to help my mother keep our crops quite full and rounded out.

How we grew! Soon I was able to look in the mirror opposite our nest, and I could see the change in us from day to day. Canaries grow up very quickly, and when we were a fortnight old, we had nice feathers and were beginning to feed ourselves. There was myself, a little brother, and a sister. I had a great deal to learn in those fourteen days, which would be like two or three years in the life of a child.

My little mother Dixie used to tell us stories as she brooded over us. Some people do not know that when a mother bird hovers over her little ones, and twitters softly to them, that she is telling them tales, just as a human mother amuses her babies.

My mother told us that we ought to be very happy little birds, for we were not in a cage where canaries are usually hatched, but in a good-sized bird-room, in a comfortable nest. This nest was a small wooden box, placed on a shelf high up on the wall, and we could stand on the edge of it and look all about the room.

My mother also told us that we must love, next to our parents,

the young girl who owned this bird-room and who came in many times a day to feed and water us and to see that we were all comfortable.

I shall never forget how I felt the first day I rose up in our nest, stepped to the edge of our box, and looked about the bird-room.

It seemed enormous to me. I gasped and fell back in the nest. Then I looked again, and this time the sight did not make me feel so weak, and I straightened things out.

It was, or is, for I often visit it yet, a good-sized attic room, with one big window looking east, and a door opening into a hall. Standing two and three deep all round the room were rows of fir trees, straight but not very tall, and looking like little soldiers. They were in big pots of earth, and my mother told me that every few months they were taken out and fresh ones were put in. Running between the trees and resting on their branches were long, slender poles and perches, for fir branches are not usually very good to sit on. A bird likes a spreading branch, not one that hugs the tree.

In the middle of the room was a tiny fountain, with rock work round it. Night and day it murmured its pretty little song, and the birds splashed and bathed and played games in the shallow basin under it. There were not big birds in the room, so we did not need a deep bathing pool.

Beyond the fountain were the trays of green sods and dishes of food and seeds. Oh, what good things we had to eat, for as we were not caged birds, we could have quite rich food. Then

we took so much exercise flying to and fro that it sharpened our appetites. I shall never forget the good taste of the egg food that I fed myself, and the bread and milk, the bits of banana and orange, and pineapple and apples, and pears and grapes—the little saucers of corn meal and wheat and oatmeal porridge, and the nice, firm, dry seeds—rape, millet, canary, hemp and sometimes as a great treat a little poppy seed.

The floor was covered with gravel and old lime, and once a month a man came in and swept it all up and put down a fresh lot.

Near the fountain was one small wicker chair, and there Miss Martin, the lame girl who owned us all, used to sit by the hour and watch us.

As I sat, a weak young thing, on the edge of my nest, looking down into the room, it seemed to me that there were a great many birds flying about, and I should never be able to tell one from the other. However, I soon learned who they all were. First of all, there was my lovely mother Dixie, an American canary, with dainty whirls of feathers on her wings, my golden colored father Norfolk, my father's sister Silkie, her roller canary mate Silver-Throat, who was a tiny, mottled bird, with an exquisite voice, and about twenty other canaries of different breeds, some Australian parakeets, African love-birds, nonpareils, and indigoes, and in the nest beside me my little sister Cayenna and my brother Green-Top, so called from his green crest. I am a plainhead.

My mother told me a great many stories about all these other birds, but I will not put them down just now.

I must tell, though, about my naming. I had a trouble just as soon as my eyes opened. My big brother Green-Top was jealous of me. He is a larger, handsomer bird than I am, but even when we were babies my parents said that his voice would not be as good as mine. Just as soon as he got the use of his wings he began to beat me. My parents naturally stood up for me, because I am smaller and weaker and plainer looking. It was really surprising that I should turn out to be such an ordinary-looking little bird, when I have such handsome parents.

Green-Top told me that the old birds in the room said I was the exact image of my grandmother Meenie, who was a very common little bird from very common stock, that Miss Mary Martin brought into the bird-room out of pity for her.

Well, anyway, our Mary Martin was not slow in finding out that I was set upon, and one day as she stood watching us, she said to me, "Come here, you golden baby. I haven't named you yet."

She held out her hand as she spoke, and I lighted on her shoulder and got a lump of sugar for being obedient.

"I like the way you stand up to that naughty brother of yours," she said. "You are a little hero. I am going to call you Richard the Lion-Hearted and Dicky-Dick for short."

All the birds were listening to her, and when she stopped speaking you could hear all over the room the funny little canary sounds, like question marks, "Eh! What! La! La! Now what do you think of that! Such a grand name for a little plainhead bird!"

Naming a bird was a very exciting event in the bird-room and

always caused a great deal of talk.

Green-Top was furious. His name sounded quite short and of no account, compared with Richard the Lion-Hearted. To show his displeasure he dashed across the room and brushed our Mary's ears with his wings. That was a favorite trick of the birds —to brush the hair or the ears of Miss Mary, or to light on her head, and the way they did it showed the state of their feelings toward her.

"Naughty boy!" she said, shaking her head at him. "Hemp seed for every bird in the room except Green-Top," and she fed us an extra portion of this seed we liked best while he, knowing better than to come forward, sat in a corner and sulked.

She was just like a mother to us all, so good and indulgent, but she would not have any bullies in her bird home, and if a bird got too bad she gave him away.

After a while she went out of the room, and Green-Top flew at me, beat me, and was beginning to chase me most wickedly, when our father called us to have a singing lesson.

By this time we were six weeks old, and had been driven out of our nest three weeks ago. My mother was now getting ready for a second family. Miss Mary had given her a fresh box with a new nest in it, and my mother was lining it with soft cow hair, moss, dry grass, and short lengths of soft, white string. Our Mary never gave her birds long bits of anything, for they would have caught on their claws and tripped them up.

We young ones watched her jealously. We had cried bitterly

when we were put out of the nest. Our mother did not beat us, but our father did.

"Don't you understand, babies," she said, as she turned herself round and round in the nest to shape it with her breast, "that I must get ready for this second family? I could not have you hanging about your old home. You would step on the nestlings. You must go out in the room and get acquainted with some of the young birds, for a year hence you will be choosing mates of your own."

"I don't want to go out in the room, mother," I chirped bitterly. "I want to stay with you. Green-Top is so ugly to me and sets my cousins on to tease me. They crowd me at night on the perch, they make me wait at the food dishes till they have eaten. I want to live with you. You are so pretty and so good and comfortable."

"Darling, darling," she twittered in her lovely soft tones. "Come at night and perch near me. Wait till your father puts his head under his wing."

This was very soothing, and at least I had happy nights, although my days were always more or less worried. Parents don't know what a lot of trouble their young ones have when they first leave the home nest.

To come back to our singing lesson. My father was terribly strict with us, and we just hated it, though our mother told us to get all we could out of him, for as soon as the new nestlings came he would not pay much attention to us.

"Then what will you do," she said, "for a canary that can not

sing is a no-account canary?"

"I wish I were a hen-bird like Cayenna," I said sulkily. "She never has to sing."

"Hen birds never sing," said my mother. "Cayenna's beauty and the exquisite coloring that she will have later on, for I shall make her eat plenty of pepper food, will carry her through life. You are a very plain little bird, my darling. Your voice will be your only charm. Promise me, promise me, that you will mind what your daddy says."

"I'll try, mother," I used to say every time she talked to me, but at nearly every lesson, when my father lost his temper, I forgot what I had promised her, and lost mine too. This day I was particularly sulky, and it wasn't long before I was getting a good pecking from my father Norfolk.

"I never heard such harsh and broken tones," he said angrily. "Listen to Green-Top, how he holds his song like an endless strain."

I tried again, but unfortunately I caught my uncle Silver-Throat's eye, and broke down and gurgled and laughed in my father's beak.

Didn't I catch it! He and Green-Top both fell on me, and to save my feathers I flew straight to the most sheltered fir tree in the room, where Uncle Silver-Throat sat hunched up all day long, holding against the wall that part of his body which had once been a lovely tail.

He is a little Hartz Mountain canary, with a fluffy, mottled

breast, and he has the most wonderful voice in the room.

He was laughing now. "Come here, poor little birdie," he said. "There is no use trying to learn from your father; he is too impatient. He can't sing, anyway. He is an English bird, and all his race are bred for form and appearance. My race is for song. It doesn't matter how we look. Can he teach you the water-bubble, deep roll, bell, flute, warble, whistle, and the numberless trills I can? Does his voice have a range of four octaves?"

"No, indeed," I said, "but he is my father, and I would like to learn from him."

"That's right," he said heartily. "I really think you should control yourself a little more. Well, we'll leave it this way. Go back to your father, when he becomes calm, and learn all you can from him, but come to me for extra lessons. I'll teach you to sing much better than that scamp Green-Top does, for your voice is sweeter than his. He is a very disrespectful, saucy young bird. It is he that puts your father up to abusing you, I believe."

"Uncle," I said timidly, "two days ago you had a fine tail. Now you have none. Why is it?"

He smiled. "I am quite a deep thinker, birdie, and yesterday as I sat dreaming on this branch, I failed to notice that new, golden spangled Lizard canary who has lately come to the bird-room. She was acting queerly about the five eggs she has just laid. Finally I did remark that she was breaking and eating them. It seems she had a poor home before she came here, where she was fed stale seeds. So Avis, being scantily fed and having no dainties

given her, used to eat a nice fresh egg whenever she could get it. 'Well,' I said to myself, 'they are her own eggs. She has a right to eat them if she chooses,' so I didn't interfere.

"Her mate Spotty came along after a while and fell into a rage. He asked if any bird had seen her at this mischief, and I said I had.

"He asked why I hadn't stopped her, and I said it was none of my business.

"He said it was, that all the birds in the room, even the parakeets and the love-birds who are pretty selfish, had made up their minds to stop this business of egg-breaking; then they all fell on me and picked out my tail feathers to remind me to interfere when I saw another bird doing anything wrong."

"Do you feel badly about it, uncle?" I asked.

"My tail is pretty sore, but my mind is tranquil. I did wrong, but I have been punished for it, and my feathers will grow. Why worry about it? I am sorry for Spotty. He expected to have a nice lot of young ones in thirteen days, and now he will have to wait for weeks."

"Why would Avis eat her eggs, when she has plenty of lime and crushed egg shell and all sorts of food here?" I asked.

"Habit, my birdie. She had the naughty trick and could not get over it. If I had only shrieked at her, it would have frightened her and kept her from murdering all her future nestlings, as Spotty says. But there is your cayenne pepper food coming. Go and eat some, so that your feathers will be reddish gold. It is a good throat

tonic, too."

Our Mary was just coming in with a saucer of mixed egg food, grated sweet bread, granulated sugar and cayenne pepper sprinkled on the top of it. She also had a deep dish of something purple.

"Blueberries, birds," she said, as she put it down. "Nice canned blueberries, almost as fresh as if they had just come off the bushes."

Nearly every bird in the room uttered a satisfied note, then they all flew to her feet where she set the dishes.

I was not hungry, and ate little. When she opened the door a few minutes later to go out, I flew to her and lighted on her arm.

My father was taking a nap, and I knew by the wicked look in Green-Top's eye that he would begin bullying me as soon as she left the room.

"Take me out," I chirped, "take me out," for I knew that she often took good steady little birds out into her own part of the house.

She understood me. "But, Dicky-Dick," she said, "you are so young. I fear you might fly away."

"I'll be good. I'll be good," I sang in my unsteady young voice, and, relenting, she put out a finger, urged me gently to her shoulder where she usually carried her birds, that being the safest foothold, and walked out into the hall.

My mother saw me going and called out a warning. "Be careful, Dicky-Dick. You will see strange sights. Don't lose your

head. Keep close to our Mary."

"I'll be careful, careful," I called back, but my heart was going pit-a-pat when the bird-room door closed behind me, and I went out into the strange new world of the hall.

CHAPTER II
A TRIP DOWNSTAIRS

OH, what a different air the hall had—very quiet and peaceful, no twittering of birds and never-stopping flying and fluttering, and chattering and singing, and with the murmur of the fountain going on, even in our sleep! There was no gravel on this floor, just a soft-looking thing the color of grass, that I found out afterward was called a carpet.

Our Mary hopped cheerfully down the stairs. She was quite a young girl, and had had a fall when a baby, that had made her very lame. Her parents gave her the bird-room to amuse her, so my mother had told me, for she could not go much on the street.

On the floor below the attic were some wide cheerful rooms with sunny windows. These were all called bedrooms, and her parents and two little cousins slept in them. There was nobody in them on this morning of my first visit to the big world outside the bird-room, and we went down another long staircase. Here was a wider hall than the others, and several rooms as large as two or three bird-rooms put together.

Our Mary took me in between long curtains to a very beautiful place, with many things to sit on and a covering for the floor just as soft as our grass sods. She was quite out of breath, and dropping down on a little chair, put up a finger for me to step on

it from her shoulder, and sat smiling at me.

"What big eyes, birdie!" she said. "What are you frightened of?"

"Of everything," I peeped; "of this big world, and the huge things in it."

She laughed heartily. "Oh, Dicky-Dick, our modest house overcomes you. I wish you could see some of the mansions up the street."

"Oh, this is large enough for me, large enough, large enough," I was just replying, when I got a terrible fright.

A big monster, ever so much higher than our Mary and dressed differently, was just coming into the room.

I gave a cry of alarm, and mounted, mounted in the air till I reached something with branching arms that came down from the ceiling. I found out afterward that light came from this brass thing. I sat on it, and looking down with my head thrust forward and my frightened feathers packed closely to my body, I called out, "Mary, Mary, I'm scary, scary!" which was a call I had learned from the older birds.

Mary was kissing the monster, and then she sat down close beside him and held on to one of his black arms.

"Dicky, Dicky," she sang back to me, "this is my daddy, don't be scary. Why, I thought he had been in the bird-room since you were hatched. Come down, honey."

Of course if he was her father, he would not hurt me, so I flew back to her shoulder, but what a queer-looking, enormous father!

I was glad my parent did not look like that.

He was very loving with her, though, and, stroking her hair, he said, "Don't tire yourself too much with your birds, Mary."

"They rest me, father," she said, shaking her brown head at him, "and this new baby amuses me very much. He is so inquiring and clever and such a little victim, for his bigger brother beats the life out of him."

"The canary world is like the human world," said Mary's father, "sleep, eat, fight, play, over and over again—will your young pet let me stroke him?"

"I think so," she said, "now that he knows who you are."

"Why, certainly, certainly," I twittered. "Everybody's kind but brother."

The man laid a big finger, that seemed to me as heavy as a banana, on my golden head, and stroked me till I bent under the caress.

Fortunately some other person came in the room and he turned his head.

This was our Mary's mother, Mrs. Martin. I knew her well, for she often came into the bird-room. She was a very large, cheerful lady, not very handsome, nor remarkable in any way, and yet different from most women, so the old birds said. I had heard them talking about her, and they said she is one that understands birds and beasts, and it is on account of her understanding that our Mary loves us. They said she is a very wonderful woman, and that there is power in her eye—power over human beings and

animals, and more wisdom even than our Mary has, for she is old, and her daughter is young.

"The young can not know everything," the old birds often sang; "let them listen to the old ones and be guided by them."

When Mrs. Martin came in, her quick brown eyes swept over the room, taking in her daughter, her husband, and even little me perched on our Mary's finger.

"Thank fortune, I'm not late for lunch," she said, sinking into a chair, "and thank fortune, we have a guest. Excuse me for being late, birdie," she said in a most natural way, and treating me with as much courtesy as if I had been as big as the picture of the eagle on our bird-room wall.

That's what the birds said about her, that she believes even a canary has a position in the world, and has rights. She just hates to have any creature imposed on or ill-used.

"Come here, dearie," she said, holding out her plump hand toward me, "and kiss me."

I flew to her at once, and, putting up my tiny bill, touched her red, full lips. Such a big lady she was, and yet she reminded me of my little golden mother.

"Now we will go in to the table," she said, "and little guest will sit on my right hand. Anna, bring the fern dish."

Anna was a fair-haired girl who waited on the Martins and sometimes helped our Mary in the bird-room, so I knew her quite well. I had heard of the fern dish from bird guests of the Martins, and I watched her with great interest as she set it on the huge

white table, that looked so queer to me that first day.

In the middle of the low, round dish of ferns was a little platform and on the platform was a perch. The bird guest sat on the perch and ate the food placed before him. He was not expected to run over the Martins' table and help himself.

"Dearie, you will not care for soup," said Mrs. Martin, when Anna placed a big thing like one of our bathing dishes before her.

I had never seen human beings eating, and as I sat on my perch in the fern dish I could not help smiling. They did not put their mouths down to their food, they brought the food up to their mouths by means of their arms, which are like our wings. Their legs they kept under the table.

The room in which they had their huge dishes of food and their enormous table was a wide and pleasant place with a little glass house off it, in which green and pleasant plants and flowers grew. I loved the air of this place, so peaceful and quiet, with the nice smell of food and no bad brother to bother me.

"Feed me, feed me," I chirped, for I was getting hungry now.

"Wait, my angel pet," said Mrs. Martin; "wait for the next course."

Later on I described what came next to my mother, and she said it was the leg of a soft, woolly young creature that played on the meadows, and she wondered that good people like the Martins would eat it.

"No meat for birdie," said Mrs. Martin, "but a scrap of carrot and lettuce and potato and a bit of that nice graham bread."

"Thank you, thank you," I chirped to her, "and now a drink."

Down among the ferns I had discovered a little egg cup which Mrs. Martin now filled with water for me. I was excited and thirsty and drank freely.

When the meat and vegetables were carried out by Anna, fruit and a pudding came on. I had a little of the pudding which was made of bread and jam and milk; then Mrs. Martin gave me a grape to peck.

"And now, baby," she said, "you have had enough. Can't you warble a little for us?"

I did my best, but my song did not amount to much. All this time Mr. Martin and dear Mary had been looking at me very kindly, and when I finished they both clapped their hands.

At the sound of their applause, there was a great clatter outside in the hall, and a leaping and bounding and a noise, and a queer animal not as big as these human beings, but as large as twenty canaries, came running into the room.

I had never seen anything like this, and giving one shriek of fright, I sprang from the fern dish and flew high, high up in the air to the very top of the room. Fluttering wildly round the walls, I found no support for my claws; then I heard a calm voice saying, "Come down, come down, dearie, the animal is a dog, a very good dog. She won't hurt you."

Panting violently, I dropped halfway down to a picture hung on the wall and sat there, staring at the table.

The animal was on Mr. Martin's knee. He had pushed his

chair from the table, and sat with his arm round it. Such a queer-looking thing, and yet not vicious. A kind of a wide forehead and staring eyes, and a good deal of beak, which I found out later was called a muzzle.

I was ashamed of myself, and flew right back to the fern dish. Young as I was, I knew these kind people would not let anything harm me.

"Excuse me, excuse me," I gasped. "I was scary, scary again."

"That is Billie, our dog," said Mrs. Martin; "she is good to birds. Mary, have you never had Billie in to see your pets?"

"No," said her daughter. "You know she has not been here very long."

"I would like her to be friends with them," said Mrs. Martin. "Please take her in soon, but put her out on the front steps now." Then she turned to me. "You are going to have another fright, I fear. By certain signs and tokens, I think my two adopted children are coming home for lunch."

CHAPTER III
SAMMY-SAM AND LUCY-LOO

I WAS very glad I had been warned, for there was a terrible noise out in the street that I afterward learned was caused by young creatures called children, shouting and calling to each other. Then the front door slammed and there was quiet.

Presently two very calm young beings—for Mrs. Martin would allow no shouting in her dining-room—came in, a boy and a girl.

"Lucy-Loo and Sammy-Sam," said Mrs. Martin, with a merry twinkle in her eye, for she was a great joker, "here is a new baby bird come downstairs for the first time."

The boy was a straight, well set-up young thing, eight years old, I heard afterward. The girl was a year younger, and she had light hair and big, staring eyes—very bright, intelligent eyes.

Our Mary was much older than her young cousins, and she was pretty strict with them about her birds, for they were never allowed to come into her bird-room.

The boy sat down at the table, and to my surprise said as he stared at me, "Not much of a bird, that—haven't you got anything better looking to show off?"

He was taking his soup quite sulkily.

His little sister was pouting. "I think Cousin Mary is very

mean," she said to her aunt. "She might let us go in her old bird-room. We wouldn't hurt anything."

Our Mary said nothing, but Mrs. Martin spoke. "You remember, Lucy, that one day when Mary was out, a certain little girl and a certain little boy took a troop of young friends into the bird-room, and some baby birds died of fright, and some old ones got out, and were restored to their home with difficulty."

Our Mary raised her head. "I have forgiven them, mother, and some day soon I am going to let them see my birds, but they must promise never to go into the bird-room without me."

The boy and girl both spoke up eagerly. "We promise. Will you take us in to-day?"

"No, not to-day," said our Mary. "To-morrow."

Their young faces fell, and they went on taking their soup.

"Canaries are very gentle, timid creatures," said Mrs. Martin. "You know, it is possible to kill them, without in the least intending to do so. This one we have down here to-day seems an exception. He gets frightened, but soon overcomes it. I think he is going to be an explorer."

"It is his unpleasant life in the bird-room that makes him wish to come out," said our Mary. "His little brother teases him most shamefully."

"Just the way Sammy-Sam teases me," said Lucy poutingly.

"I don't tease you," said Sammy. "You are a cry-baby."

"I'm not a cry-baby," she said.

Mrs. Martin interposed in her cheerful way. "Would you

rather take your lunch, my darlings, or go out in the hall and continue your discussion?"

"Lunch first," said the boy promptly, "but I'll argue the head off Lucy afterward."

"Take an arm or a leg," said his aunt. "The head is such an important member to lose."

I thought this a good time for a little song, so in a broken way I told of my troubles with Green-Top, and how he beat me and pulled out my feathers.

The boy and girl were delighted. "Sure he's some bird," said Sammy, and Lucy cried out, "Little sweet thing—I love you."

After lunch Mr. Martin said he would take our Mary for a drive. The children hurried back to school, and Mrs. Martin said she would go and lie down, for she was tired. "Come with me, little boy," she said to me, "or would you rather go to the bird-room?"

I flew to the ribbon shoulder knot on her dress. I admired her very much and wished to stay with her.

"Mary," she said delightedly, "I love to have this little Dicky with me. I wish you would bring one of your small cages downstairs. Put seeds and water in it and hang it on the wall of the sitting-room. Leave the door open, so he can go in and out. Of course he must spend some time each day with the old birds to perfect his song, but I would like him to have the run of the house. I think I see in him an unusual sympathy and understanding of human beings."

“He is a pet,” said our Mary. “I will be glad to have him downstairs a good deal.”

So it came about that I had a little home of my own in the room of one of the best friends of birds in the city. Our Mary was darling, but she was young. Her mother had known trouble, and she had known great joy, and she could look deep into the hearts of men and beasts and birds. I had a very happy time with her, and got to know many interesting animals and other birds. At the same time I was free to go into the bird-room whenever I wished to do so, but I found after I had become accustomed to human beings that many of the birds there seemed narrow and very taken up with their own nests, not seeing much into, nor caring much about, the great bird world outside our little room.

Therefore, to help canaries and to help friends of canaries to understand them, I am giving this little account of my life—an insignificant little life, perhaps, and yet an important little life, for even a canary is a link in the great chain of life that binds the world together.

CHAPTER IV
A SAD TIME FOR A CANARY FAMILY

TIME went by, and autumn came and then winter. I had been hatched in the early summer, and by winter time it seemed to me that I was a very old bird and knew a great deal.

I had become quite a member of the Martin family, and sometimes I did not go in the bird-room for days together.

My sleeping place was a cage in the family sitting-room upstairs. The door was never closed, and I flew in and out at will. Oh, how interested I was in the world of the house! I used to fly from room to room and sometimes I even went in the kitchen and watched Hester doing the cooking. She had a little shelf near a window filled with plants, and I always lighted there, for she did not like me to fly about and get on her ironing board or pastry table. I became so interested in the family that I thought I would never get tired of exploring the house, but when winter came I found myself staring out in the street. I wanted to get out and see what the great out-of-doors was like.

Early in the winter we had much excitement in the bird-room. A very happy time called Christmas was coming. Everybody gave presents, and Mr. Martin's gift to his daughter was money to build a fine large flying place on the roof for her birds. We would

not be able to use it until spring, but he said the work had better be done in the winter because it was easier to get carpenters than it would be later on, and there were some poor men he wished to employ during the cold weather.

What chirping and chattering and gossip there were among the birds! There was no nesting going on now, and not much to talk about. Soon two men came, and from the big window we birds watched them putting up a good-sized framework out on the roof and nailing netting to it. What a fine large place we should have right out in the sunshine.

There were no fir trees put out there on account of fire. Mr. Martin said sparks from chimneys might start a blaze, but the men made things like trees of metal, with nice spreading branches. A part of this flying cage was covered over—and up under the roof, where no rain could wet them, the men put tiny nesting boxes.

"Why, we shall be just like wild birds," said my mother joyfully, "with nests outside in the fresh air. What lovely, strong young ones we shall have! It has been a trifle hot in the bird-room in summer."

My poor little mother had felt the heat terribly through the latter part of the summer, but that had not prevented her from doing her duty by her second family of young ones. They were very interesting little fledglings—three male birds, and three hen-birds, and strange to say my naughty brother Green-Top was as kind to them as he had been unkind to me.

It is no easy matter to feed six hearty young canaries, and it was the prettiest sight in the world to see him fly to the dish of egg food, stuff his beak and hurry to the nestlings with it. He was a great help to my parents. He was the only young canary in the bird-room that helped his parents feed new babies, and the old birds gave him great credit for it.

He would not let me go near the nest. I had politely offered to help him, but he told me in an angry way that I was a rover and despised my home, and if I did not get out, he would pick at my eyes and blind me for life.

"Don't mind him, darling, darling," sang my dear mother, who never forgot me. Norfolk, my father, paid no attention to me now. A steely look came into his eyes whenever I went near him, and one day he sang coldly at me, "Who are you, who are you?" though he knew quite well I was his son.

Green-Top was his favorite now. My brother just loved our father and perched near him at night, and was so attentive to him that the old birds said, "That young one will never mate. He loves his parents too well. He will always live with them."

I never dared sing in the bird-room now, for if I did Green-Top always pulled my tail or looked down my throat. These are great tricks with canaries, to take the conceit out of a bird they think vain. Often when in the gladness, of my heart at getting back into the bird-room I would burst into song, Green-Top would steal behind me and tweak my tail severely, and if he was busy about something, he would wink at one of my cousins to do it for him.

A terrible trouble, a most unspeakable and dreadful trouble, came upon us as a family and poisoned our happiness that winter. My beautiful mother Dixie, who had been allowed to have too many nests and raise too many nestlings in her short life, sickened and died. I shall never forget seeing her fail from day to day. First she had asthma and sat gasping for breath, with her beak wide open. Our Mary did everything for her. She gave her iron tonic and different medicines, but nothing did any good. Day by day her poor little body looked like a puff-ball, and her quick, short gasps for breath were most painful to hear. Her voice failed, and she had to take castor oil and paregoric and glycerine and had rock-candy in her drinking water.

"It is no use," said our Mary one day. "My dear Dixie, you will have to go, but I think there is a little bird heaven somewhere where you will be happy, and will not suffer any more, and some day all your little family will go to it, and fly about gaily with you ever after."

My little mother opened her eyes, her very beautiful eyes, though all the rest of her body was drooping and disfigured now. They opened so wide that I thought perhaps she was going to get better. Many times since I have seen that strange look in the eyes of a dying bird—a look of great astonishment, as if they had suddenly caught sight of something they had not seen before. Then the lovely eyes closed, her tiny head fell over, and our Mary said softly, "Her little bird spirit has flown away."

She held her out in the palm of her hand for all the birds to

see, then she took her away, and though it was winter and deep snow was on the ground, she had the gardener dig a little grave and she buried her in a tin box, quite deep in the ground, where no roaming cats nor dogs would get her.

We watched her from the window, all of us except my father Norfolk. He sang all the rest of the day at the top of his voice, almost a screaming song. He sang because he thought his heart was breaking, but in a few weeks he was flying about with Avis, the canary who ate her eggs. Her mate Spotty had died, and our Mary was pleased to have her take up with Norfolk, for he was a steady bird and always at home, not like poor Spotty, who used to be mostly at the opposite end of the bird-room from his home, gossiping and chattering with canaries when he should have been attending to his mate.

My mother's death saddened me terribly, and for a long time I spent a large part of every day in the bird-room with my young brothers and sisters, all of whom had nice names. The hen-birds were Pretty Girl, Beauty, and Cantala, and the males were Pretty Boy, Redgold, and Cresto. Such little dear things they were, all gentle and good, no fighters among them.

At first Green-Top let me help him father them. Then when he got over his grief he began to beat me again, and I lost feathers.

When I speak of beating, I must not be taken too seriously. When canaries fight, they fly up into the air and down again, fluttering wings, crying out, and making dashes at each other—a great fuss and flurry, but not much harm done. The hen-birds

fight this way a good deal in nesting time, then their mates come and help them, and the whole bird-room is in a commotion.

A more serious way of fighting is chasing. One bird takes a dislike to another bird and pursues him unmercifully, striking him about the head till his beak is sore and bleeding. That is the way Green-Top served me, and soon I made up my mind that I was not needed in the bird-room and I got into the habit of spending about all my time downstairs, only coming up once in a while to see how all the birds were, and find out if they were getting anything to eat that I did not have.

Everybody was so good to me. Hester put little tidbits on my shelf in the kitchen, Mrs. Martin was always handing dainties to me, and even Mr. Martin would bring home a fine apple or some grapes or an orange for me to peck at.

The children were the best of all. Not a bit of candy or cake did they get but what a bit was saved for me, and many a greasy or sticky little morsel that I just pretended to eat was laid before me.

It was curious about those children. They were rather naughty with human beings, but ever since their cousin Mary allowed them to go in the bird-room, once a day with her, they had become nicer to birds and animals.

CHAPTER V
MY NEW FRIEND, CHUMMY HOLE-IN-THE-WALL

AS I have said before, a strange longing to be out of doors came over me as winter passed away and spring approached. I never wearied of sitting on the window ledges and watching the plucky little English sparrows who sometimes came to the bird-room window and talked over the news of the day with us.

Most of the canaries were very haughty with them, and looked down on them as inferior birds. So the sparrows rarely approached us, unless they had important news to communicate, when eagerness to hear what they had to say made the canaries forget to snub them.

That clever woman, Mrs. Martin, knew that I wished to get out in the street, and one day when there was a sudden thaw after very cold weather, she said to me, as I sat on her bedroom window sill, "I believe my little boy would like a fly out of doors."

"Dear Missie, Missie, Missie," I sang, "how sweet you are to me, how sweet!"

"Fly away, then," she said, throwing up the window. "I don't think the air is cold enough to hurt you."

"Thank you, thank you," I sang, as I flew by her and out into the fresh air.

How can I ever describe my feelings on my first flight into the great big out-of-doors. I had, in my callow innocence, thought the Martin house very large and grand. Why, this big, out-door house had a ceiling so far away that only a very strong bird could ever fly to the top of it.

I felt breathless and confused, and flying straight to a big tree in front of the window, flattened myself against a dark limb, and crouched there half frightened, half enchanted with myself.

Suddenly a sharp little voice twittered, "Oho! little golden bird, and who are you?"

I knew that a street sparrow's eyes are everywhere, so I was not surprised on looking up to see a male bird, with quite a pretty black throat patch, sitting on a limb above me.

"I am a canary," I said.

"I know that," he replied, rather impatiently, "but how is it that you are so strong of wing? You fly like a wild bird."

"I have not always been in the bird-room," I said; "I have flown all over the house and exercise has strengthened my wings."

"Oh, you are the little youngster I have noticed looking from between the window curtains. How is it that you were allowed to leave the bird-room?"

"The canaries call me Dicky-Dick the Rover. At an early age I found the bird-room small," I said, not wishing to tell him about my troubles with my brother.

"How old are you?" he asked.

"Nearly a year."

"What is your name?"

"Richard the Lion-Hearted," I said, thinking to impress him by its length, "but my mistress says that is too heavy a name for such a tiny bird, so she shortens it to Dicky-Dick and sometimes Dicky-Duck."

"The Lion-Hearted," repeated the sparrow. "That name doesn't suit you. You seem to be a very gentle bird."

"I am gentle till I am roused," I said meekly; "then I am a fair fighter. Now, will you tell me what your name is?"

"Chummy Hole-in-the-Wall."

This beat my name, and I said, "That's a double, double surname."

"Yes," he said proudly. "It's a good name, given to me by all the sparrows of the neighborhood."

"And may I ask how old you are?"

"Six years."

"You must be very wise," I said. "I feel as if I knew a great deal, and I am not one year yet."

"I know everything about this neighborhood," he said grandly. "If you wish the life history or habits of any bird here, I can inform you of them."

"I shall be sure to come to you for information," I said. Then I asked anxiously, "What are the birds like in this street?"

"Pretty decent, on the whole. There were some bad sparrows and two ugly old pigeons, but we had a midwinter drive, and chased them all down in St. John's ward, where the common birds

live. You know we sparrows have our own quarters all over this city."

"Have you?" I said. "Like big bird-rooms?"

"Yes, my little sir, we in this district near the gray old university are known as the Varsity sparrows. We are bounded on the north by Bloor Street, on the south by College Street, on the east by Yonge Street, and on the west by Spadina Avenue, and this is the worst street of all for food."

"I have heard that this has been a very hard winter for all birds," I said.

"It has been perfectly terrible. It snowed, and it snowed, and it snowed. Every scrap of food was under a white blanket. If it hadn't been for covers left off trash cans, and a few kind people who threw out crumbs, the sparrows would all have died."

"The snow is going now," I said, with a smile.

He laughed a queer, hard little sparrow laugh, and looked up and down the street. The high rounded snow banks were no longer white and beautiful, but grimy and soot-laden, and they were weeping rivers of dusky tears. The icy sidewalks were so slippery with standing water that ladies and children went into the street, but it was not much better there, and often they lost their rubbers, which went sailing down the streams like little black boats.

However, up in the blue heaven, the sun was shining, and there was warmth in it, for this was February and spring would soon be with us.

I looked up and down the street. It seemed very quaint to me, and I stretched out my neck to find out whether I could see the end of it. I could not. It went away up, up toward a hill with trees on it, and, as I found out later, away down south to a big lake where the wharves are, and the ships and the railroads, and the noise and the traffic, and also a lovely island that I had heard the Martins say was a fine place for a summer outing.

The sparrow was watching me, and at last he said, "How do you like it out here?"

"Very much," I said. "It is so big and wonderful, and there are so many houses standing away back from the street. I thought there were no houses in the world but just the Martins', and those I could see from their windows."

He smiled at me, but said nothing, and I went on, "And the trees are so enormous and so friendly. I love to see them reaching their gaunt arms across the street to shake hands. Our fir trees in the bird-room will seem very small to me now."

He shook his little dull-colored head. "Alas! the neighborhood is not what it used to be. A few years ago all these were private houses. Now boarding houses and lodging houses and even shops are creeping up from town."

I didn't know much about this, but I said timidly, "Isn't that better for you sparrows? Aren't there more scraps?"

"No, not so many. When the rich people lived here, we knew what we had to depend on. Either they would feed us, or they would not. Several kind-hearted ladies used to have their servants

throw out food for neighborhood birds at a certain hour every day, and your Mrs. Martin has always kept a little dish full of water on her lawn beside the feeding-table. I suppose you have seen that from your bird-room window."

"Oh, yes," I said. "We canaries used to sit on the window sill on cold mornings and watch Mr. Martin wading through the snow with the nice warm food that his wife was sending out for the birds."

"These boarding-house and lodging-house people come and go," the sparrow went on. "Some feed us, and some don't. Usually we are stuffed in summer, and starved in winter."

"I have heard Mrs. Martin say," I observed, "that wild birds should be assisted over bad seasons and fed whenever their natural supply gives out."

"Sparrows don't need food in summer," said Chummy, "because then we expect to do our duty to human beings by eating all the insects we can, and the bad weed seeds."

I said nothing. I thought I had not known my new friend long enough to find fault with him, but I wanted very much to ask him if he really thought English sparrows did do their duty by human beings.

"Would you like to see my little house?" he asked.

"Very much," I replied, and I followed him as he flew to another tree. We were now further up the street where we could look back at our red brick house which is a double one, and quite wide. Now we were in front of one that stood a little way from

its neighbors. It was tall and narrow, and in the middle of its high north wall was a small hole where a brick had fallen out.

Chummy pointed to it proudly. "There's not a snugger sparrow bedroom in the city than that," he said, "for right behind the open place is a hole in the brick work next the furnace chimney. No matter how cold and hungry I am when I go to bed, I'm kept warm till breakfast time, when I can look for scraps. Many a feeble old sparrow and many a weak one has died in the bitter cold this winter. They went to bed with empty crops and never woke up. We've had twelve weeks of frost, instead of our usual six, and this is only the fifth day of thawing weather that we've had all winter."

"Everything seems topsy-turvy this winter," I said. "Human beings are short of coal and food, and they're worried and anxious. I am very sorry for them.

"But times will improve, Chummy. The old birds say that black hours come, but no darkness can keep the sun from breaking through. He is the king of the world."

Chummy raised his little dark head up to the sunlight. "I'm not complaining, Dicky. I wish every little bird in the world had such a snug home as mine."

"How did the hole come in the wall?" I asked.

"Some workmen had a scaffold up there to repair the top of the chimney. When they took it down, they knocked a brick out."

"Is it large enough for you in nesting time?"

"Oh, yes; don't you want to come and see it? You're not

afraid?"

"Oh, no," I said warmly. "I know whenever I get a good look into a bird's eye whether I can trust him or not."

"Come along, then," said Chummy, deeply gratified, and I flew beside him to his little house.

CHAPTER VI
CHUMMY TELLS THE STORY OF A NAUGHTY SQUIRREL

OH, how snug!" I exclaimed. "You have a little hall and a bedroom, and how clean it is! The old birds say they like to see a bird tidy his nest from one year to another. Do you keep the same mate?"

"I do," he replied. "I always have Jennie, but as you probably know, sparrows don't pair till spring. In the winter the birds are in flocks. Jennie is spending these hard months with her parents downtown near the station because the food supply is better there. I often go to see her, and I expect her back soon to begin housekeeping. We like to get ahead of the others in nesting, for there are evil birds who try every year to drive us from our desirable home."

"Everything born has to fight," I said cheerfully.

"I don't know much about canaries," said Chummy. "All that I have seen were very exclusive and haughty, and looked down on us street birds."

"Some of my family are that way," I sighed, "but I have been much with human beings and my little head has more wisdom in it."

"I like you," Chummy began to say heartily; then he stopped

short, cried out, and said, “Duck your head quick and come inside!”

I scuttled from his wide open hallway into his little bedroom, wondering what had happened. A shower of nutshells had just been dropped past our beaks. “Who’s doing that?” I asked.

“Squirrie—he hates me because he can’t get a foothold to explore this house.”

“And who is Squirrie?” I asked.

“The worst little rascal of a squirrel that you ever saw. He respects nobody, and what do you think is his favorite song?—not that he can sing. His voice is like a crow’s.”

“I can’t imagine what kind of songs a squirrel would sing,” I said.

“I’ll run over it for you,” said Chummy, “though I haven’t a very good voice myself.

> “‘I care for nobody, no not I,
> And nobody cares for me.
> I live in the middle of Pleasant Street
> And happy will I be!’

“Now what do you think of that for a selfish song in these hard times?”

I laughed heartily. “Perhaps you take Squirrie too seriously. I’d like to see the little rogue. Does he live in this house of yours?”

“Yes, right up over us under the roof. He gnawed a hole through from the outside this summer, and stored an enormous

quantity of nuts that he stole from good Mrs. Lacey at the corner grocery on the next street. He has an enormous place to scamper about in if he wishes to stretch his legs. He says in the corner of it he has a delightfully warm little bed-place, lined with tiny soft bits of wool and fur torn from ladies' dresses, for he has the run of most of the bedrooms in the neighborhood. Have you seen the two old maids that live in the big attic of this house?"

"Yes, my mistress calls them the bachelor girls," I said politely.

"Girls," he said scornfully; "they're more like old women. Well, anyway, they're afraid of mice and rats, and when Squirrie wakes up and scampers across the boards to his pantry to get a nut, and rolls it about, and gnaws it, and nibbles it, they nearly have a fit, and run to the landlady and hurry her up the three flights of stairs.

"She listens and pants, and says, 'It must be a rat, it's too noisy for a mouse.' Then she goes down cellar and gets a rat-trap and props its big jaws open with a bit of cheese and sets it in a corner of the room.

"Squirrie watches them through a tiny hole in the trapdoor in the ceiling that he made to spy on them, and he nearly dies laughing, for he loves to tease people, and he hisses at them in a low voice, 'The trap isn't made yet that will catch me. I hope you'll nip your own old toes in it.'"

"What very disrespectful talk," I exclaimed.

"Oh, he doesn't care for anybody, and the other night his

dreadful wish came true, and he was so delighted that he most lost his breath and had squirrel apoplexy."

"How did it happen?" I asked.

The sparrow ran his little tongue out over his beak, for he dearly loves to talk, and went on, "You see, the bachelor ladies were moving their furniture about to make their room look prettier, and they forgot the trap, and Miss Maggie did catch her toe in it, and there was such a yelling and screaming that it woke me out of a sound sleep.

"The lodgers all came running upstairs with fire extinguishers, and flat irons, and pokers, and one man had a revolver. I thought the house was on fire, and I flew out of my little hole in the wall to this tree. I came here, and from a high limb I could look right in the attic window. The lodgers were all bursting into the room and poor Miss Maggie, in curl papers and pink pajamas, was shrieking and dancing on one foot, and holding up the other with the trap on the toe of her bedroom slipper.

"Out on the roof, Squirrie was bending down to look at her. He was lying on his wicked little stomach, and he laughed so hard that at last he had to roll over in the snow on the roof to get cool. He looked terrible, and we all hoped he was going to pass away in the night, but the next morning as we sat round on the tree talking about him, and trying to think of some good thing he had done, he poked his head out of the hole which is his front door, and made the most ugly faces at us that you can imagine. He is certainly a dreadful creature, and I shall be sorry for the

housekeepers about here when the spring comes."

I smiled at Chummy's earnestness and settled down more comfortably with my breast against the bricks. The day was so pleasant that I thought I would stay out a little longer. I knew by the look in his little, bright eye that the sparrow liked talking to me. We were in a patch of sunlight that crept in his front door, and after the long cold winter the nice warm feeling on our feathers was very comforting.

"How does Squirrie trouble the housekeepers?" I asked.

"Well, to begin with, he bothers them because he has no home duties. He is an ugly, odd, old bachelor, and never gets a mate in the spring, because no self-respecting young squirrel will take up with such a scamp."

"Poor creature!" I said. "It is enough to make any one ugly to live alone."

Chummy went on: "Squirrie has been two years only in this neighborhood. He never stays long anywhere, for his bad deeds make enemies for him, and he is driven away. When he first came here he lived in Snug Hollow, that big hole in the half-dead elm at the corner. Just opposite the tree is a lodging-house. You can see it from here, that one with the upper verandas. It is kept by a soldier's widow, and she is rather poor. She could not afford to put in window screens, and Squirrie had a royal time with one of her lodgers, a young student up in the third story. He was very odd, and would eat no meat. He lived on nuts, cheese, fruit, eggs, and bread—just the things Squirrie likes. So

he made up his mind to board with the student. The young man was a fresh-air fiend, and never closed his windows. This just suited Squirrie, so whenever this young Dolliver went over to the University, Squirrie would spring from a tree branch to the roof, and was down on the veranda and into the room in a trice. He rarely ate anything on the spot. He carried everything away to his hole in the tree, so the student thought that the maid who did his room must be stealing his things.

"He questioned her, but she said she knew nothing about his food. Then he locked the chest of drawers where he kept his supplies. Squirrie climbed up the back, enlarged a knothole and went in that way. The student thought the girl must have a key. So he went to the landlady. She dismissed the maid and got another, but the student's things went faster than ever.

"The next thing was that the student lost his temper and told the soldier's widow that she would do well to feed her maid better, and she told him that if he didn't like her house he could get out.

"However, she sent this second girl away and got another. It was the same old story—nuts, fruit, cheese, bread still vanished. Then the student got in a worse temper, and turned all the clothes out of his trunk and made that his pantry, and carried the key in his pocket.

"Now he lost nothing, for Squirrie, clever as he was, could not get in a locked trunk. He was up a tree, indeed, but he was clever enough to find a way down. The soldier's widow was his next

victim, and he would watch the windows and see where she was, and often when her back was turned he would dart in the house, seize some bit of food, and run away with it.

"'Now,' said the soldier's widow, 'this last girl is dishonest, too. She can't get into the student's trunk, and she has turned against me.' So she sent her away, though the girl cried and said she was well brought up, and would not steal a pin.

"By this time the house had such a bad name among maids that the soldier's widow could not get another, and she had too much work to do and became thin and miserable, and still the stealing went on, till at last she said, 'I must be a thief myself, and don't know it.'

"However, any one who does wrong is always paid up for it, and Squirrie was soon caught. By this time he was so fat he could scarcely run, and he had enough nuts and hard biscuits laid up to last him for two winters. To keep down his flesh, he began to tease the dog in the lodging-house. Not in the daytime, for he did not wish to be seen. He used to chatter, chatter to Rover as he lay on the porch in the warm summer evenings, and tease him by sitting up on his hind legs and daring him to play chase. There was no cat in the house to head Squirrie off, so he would run round and round the yard and sometimes in the front door, and out the back, with old Rover loping after him, his tongue hanging out of his mouth, and his face quite silly.

"'The dog has gone crazy,' said the soldier's widow one evening, as she saw Rover running about the yard and sometimes

down to the old barn behind the house and back again. 'He will have to be poisoned.'

"Rover was nearly crazy. He left the mischievous squirrel and ran to his good mistress, and put his paws on her knees, but she did not understand and pushed him away.

"I felt terribly and wondered whether I could not do something to help."

"How did you know all this?" I interrupted. "You would be in bed dark evenings."

"Why surely you know," said Chummy, "that all birds of the day tell their news to the birds of the night—to owls, to bats, and even to some insects. Then, in turn, we get the news of the night. I had a very smart young screech-owl watching Squirrie for me."

"Yes, yes," I said hurriedly. "We cage birds are more handicapped than you wild ones. I know, though, about the bird exchange. I've heard the old birds say that they have even had to depend on cockroaches sometimes for items of news, when they couldn't get about themselves."

"Well," continued Chummy, "I made up my mind something had to be done to enlighten the soldier's widow, so the next morning I just hovered round and gave up all thought of breakfast for myself, though of course I rose extra early, and fed the young ones before my mate got up.

"I watched the soldier's widow when she took the bottle of milk from the refrigerator and put it on the pantry shelf. I watched her when she poured some in a little pitcher and put it

on the dining-room table. I still kept my eye on her when she went to the back door to speak to the vegetable man, but after that I watched Squirrie.

"The little beast was darting into the dining-room. He went straight for the milk pitcher and holding on the edge with his paws, he ran his head away down into it, to get a good long drink.

"I lighted on the window sill and gave a loud squawk. The soldier's widow turned round, looked past me, and saw Squirrie with his head in the milk pitcher. She gave a loud and joyful squeal, dropped the cabbage she was holding and ran in the room, just in time to see Squirrie with a very milky face darting out the other door to the front of the house.

"Oh, how happy she was! It had all come over her in a flash what a goose she had been not to have guessed it was a squirrel that was defrauding her. She ran up to the student's room to tell him the good news, and he went to the window and shook his fist at Squirrie and called him the red plague."

"What did Squirrie say?" I asked.

"Squirrie said, 'I don't care,' and instead of hiding from them, as he had always done before, he came boldly out on a branch, and licked his milky paws. Then he moved six doors down the street to a house where two maiden ladies lived. They have gone away now, but they kept a small tea-room and sold cake and candy. Squirrie went creeping round them, and they thought it was cute to have a little pet, so they used to put nuts for him on their windows."

"Didn't they know what mischief he had done at the corner?" I asked.

"No—you young things don't know how it is in a city. No one knows or cares who lives near by. In the nice, kind country you know everyone for miles round. Well, Squirrie got so familiar with these ladies that he used to sleep in the house and tease the family cat. He didn't do much mischief at first. He knew he was in a good place, but one day just before Easter, Satan entered into him, and he played the poor ladies a very scurvy trick.

"They had been getting their baskets all ready for Easter sales, and had them in rows on a big table—such cute-looking little Japanese baskets, they were, all red and yellow and filled with layers of nuts and candy.

"This day both ladies went downtown to buy more things for more baskets, and Squirrie got into the room and began playing with those that were finished. I saw him through the window, but what could I do? When I chirped to him that he was a bad beast to spoil the work of the two ladies who had been so good to him, he chattered his teeth and made a face at me.

"Now, if he had just played with one or two baskets, it would not have mattered so much, but he is like Silly Bob in cherry time."

"Who is Silly Bob?" I asked.

"A robin who is weak in his head. Instead of eating a few cherries, he runs all over a tree, and gives each cherry a dab in the cheek—ruins them all and makes the gardeners furious with him.

Squirrie ran up and down the rows of tempting-looking baskets, so afraid was he that he could not get all his mischief in before the ladies came back. He bit a few straws on the top of each one, then he attacked the sides and then the bottom. Then he tore the covers off and threw the candy and nuts on the floor."

"What! Out of every one?" I asked, in a shocked voice.

"Every one, I tell you. Oh, they were a sight! Every basket was ruined. The nuts he carried off to his hole in the tree."

"And what did the poor ladies say when they came back?" I asked.

"You should have seen their faces. They had paid fifty cents apiece for the baskets, and you know how expensive nuts and candies and raisins are. Then they got angry and hired a carpenter to come and nail up Squirrie's hole in the tree, taking good care to see that he was out of it first. If he went near the house, they threw things at him."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.