

THE WINGED CHILDREN

A Story of Children  
with Winged Bodies  
for Children with  
Winged Minds

by

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## THE WINGED CHILDREN

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### Chapter 1

#### VISITORS FROM THE TROPICS

As the day for closing school drew near, Kenneth and Lucille looked forward to a dull summer. Everybody seemed to be going somewhere for the long vacation except themselves. To begin with, their father, who was a photographer, was leaving for Central America to take pictures of the Indians, and the animals of the forest, and the birds, and anything else that would make an attractive photograph. Then Alice Nichols, one of their best friends, was going to Mexico with her mother to visit an aunt. And Robert Evans, who lived next door, would go to Colorado with his parents. But Lucille and Kenneth would have to stay at home and pass the long summer in the suburbs of a small city.

Kenneth tried hard to persuade his father to take him along to Central America, but it was of no use.

"No," said Mr. Colton, "when I have gone, you will be the only man in the house, and you must stay and look after your mother and sister and see that no harm befalls them. You are nearly eleven, and it is time that you begin to feel responsible for your family."

"But if I am such a man, Father," pleaded Kenneth, "you should take me along to help you. I would protect you from

the jaguars, and the boas, and the other monsters of the forest, which might pounce upon you from behind while you are focusing your camera. You ought to have some trusty friend to guard you then."

Mr. Colton smiled and patted the lad's shoulder with his big hand. "There are no monsters where I am going half so dangerous as those I shall leave behind me. I want you to stay and see that your sister comes to no harm from them. Promise me that you will."

Kenneth looked puzzled. "What monsters, Father?" he questioned slowly.

Mr. Colton led his son to a front window. Soon a big automobile dashed down the tree-shaded, curving roadway before the house, missing by inches a careless dog.

"There!" exclaimed the man. "That's one of the monsters that I mean. It's much more dangerous than any animal in the forests of Central America— especially to a little girl of nine. I want you to promise me that you will watch over Lucille and see that she does not play in the roadway. That will be a man's job."

"All right, Father," promised Kenneth, still not without feeling that it would be much more manly to stand beside his father with a rifle or cutlass while he took pictures in the tropical forest.

A few days later, Mr. Colton set forth on his long journey, with chests and trunks of cameras and photographic supplies and camping equipment. Mrs. Colton and the children saw



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him off at the railroad station. When they returned home without him, all were quiet and subdued and lonely. Kenneth was the first to break the silence.

"Oh, Mother!" he said, "I wanted so much to go with Father and see how bananas and coconuts grow, and maybe see a jaguar in the forest." The mere thought of glimpsing a great, yellow, spotted form stealing catlike between huge, dark trunks of the tropical forest sent shivers of excitement along his spine.

"And I wished to see the Indian women that Father told us about, in their bright shawls and skirts; and the monkeys and the parrots; and maybe bring an Indian baby and a little monkey and a parrot home to raise," added Lucille.

"The parrots and monkeys are much happier in the forests where they belong," their mother said gravely, "and you two are far better off <sup>here</sup> where you belong. Why! I am looking forward to a delightful summer for all of us right here, working and playing together and helping each other; weeding the flower garden and watching all the new things we've planted this year as they grow and bloom. There's love-in-a-mist, and tigridia, and tuberose, and the new spotted snap-dragons, and so many other new things for you to see without going so far. Listen!" — here Mrs. Colton stopped speaking to listen to clear, bright bird notes that seemed to drift down from one of the trees that shaded the lawn — "The Baltimore Orioles think this is a very pleasant place. They've come all the way from the tropics just to build their nest in our elm tree. They must think it a nicer tree than any they could find in

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Central America.

The orioles had nested in the elm tree in past years, but neither Kenneth nor Lucille had given much attention to them. Now that the children knew that these birds had passed the winter in the land to which their father was going, they became interested.

"O, you beautiful, proud bird!" exclaimed Kenneth one morning, as from a window at the top of the house he looked out at the slender figure, clad superbly in glowing orange and black, singing cheerfully in the treetop. Meanwhile, his mate, more plainly attired in dull yellow and gray, was weaving her pouchlike nest at the end of a slender, swinging branch of the elm tree. At their mother's suggestion, the children placed bits of string and colored yarn on the railing of the upstairs porch, and watched her take them in her sharp, skillful bill and weave them into the strong fabric.

Lucille thought that the oriole's mate ought to help build the nest. "Just like a man!" she exclaimed contemptuously, "to sit singing and loafing while his wife does all the housework!" She was in some ways wise beyond her years.

Kenneth stood up valiantly for his own sex. "He's too beautiful to work and get his lovely plumage all mussed up. He cheers her with his song while she toils—that's just as important."

Mother smiled wisely. "Let's wait and see whether he will work," she said.

Through the early weeks of June, while the female oriole

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sat patiently hatching out the four pretty eggs in the swinging basket that she had woven, her mate continued to sound his bright, clear whistles from the top of the elm tree. But soon there came a time when he sang far less. The eggs had hatched and he was busy hunting green caterpillars and winged insects and bringing them to the nest while his partner kept the naked nestlings warm. But even while he searched for food and brought it to the nest in his bill, he sent forth a few clear notes.

"There!" cried Kenneth in triumph, "see how he can work when there's need for it." As the only man in a household of women, he felt touchy about the honor of his own sex. When his father was at home, it was easier to uphold.

A week or ten days after the father oriole started to bring food to the nest, a calamity befell his family. The bough that supported the baby orioles' cradle hung over the telephone wires; and the linemen, passing that way to clear the wires, had lopped it off, nest and all. Either they had not seen the orioles' swinging nest, or they had not cared.

Lucille was the first to notice the nest lying on the grass by the sidewalk, among the litter of fallen branches that the men from the telephone company were throwing into their big truck to haul away. She ran out just in time to save it.

"Oh, you naughty men!" she exclaimed, almost in tears. "Look what you've done! You've destroyed our orioles' nest that the birds have come all the way from the tropics to



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make."

As she lifted the nest from the ground, she saw that it still held three nestlings only partly covered with feathers. They clung tightly to the bottom of the nest with their toes. The fourth had fallen out and lay dead on the sidewalk near by.

"I'm sorry; I did not see it," the big man who seemed to be the foreman of the crew said apologetically. "There! don't cry, miss; the little birds have come to no harm."

Taking a penknife from his pocket, he carefully cut off the slender twig to which the nest was fastened, and handed it to Lucille. The large branch was then thrown into the truck; the foreman tipped his cap to the little girl, climbed up to the front seat, and drove off.

Meanwhile, the parent orioles were flitting back and forth among the boughs overhead with food in their bills, perplexed and distressed by the disappearance of their nest and young.

"Now what shall we do?" asked Lucille, as she held up the nest carefully so that its occupants would not fall out.

Her brother thought a few moments. "I know!" he exclaimed, "I'll climb up into the elm tree and tie the nest as nearly as possible where it was. Then the orioles will find it and take care of their nestlings. You keep the nest while I go for some string and the ladder, so I can reach the first branch."

In a few minutes he returned with his mother, the two carrying the heavy ladder between them. He had a ball of cord in his trousers pocket. Together they set the ladder against the rough bark of the high trunk, and Kenneth climbed up a few steps. When he was above his mother's head, she handed up the nest to him. Now a new perplexity arose; he found that he

needed both hands for climbing.

Mother solved the difficulty. "Give me the nest and climb up to where you will tie it. Then let down one end of the string. By this you can pull it up."

Kenneth was a strong and fearless climber, and soon was so high in the tree and so far out on a branch that Mrs. Colton had to call and tell him it was not safe to go farther. Then he let down the string; his mother tied the nest to it by the supporting twig; and he hauled it up. He fastened it securely to a slender branch, then returned to the ground.

The parent orioles promptly found their nestlings in the new position. Soon they were bringing them food more frequently than ever, for they had become very hungry.

The children wrapped the dead nestling in green leaves, and buried it solemnly in a flower bed among the sweet-Williams.



## Chapter 2

### AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

The summer slipped by more pleasantly than Kenneth and Lucille had expected, and all too swiftly for them. There was the lawn to be mowed, and the flower-beds to be weeded and trimmed, and the rosebushes tied up, and each new kind of flower, as it opened its first blossoms, to be admired for its size and color and fragrance, and later cut to fill the vases in the house.

Then there was the great Fourth-of-July celebration, with plenty of noise, and many-colored fireworks at night, and more good things than they could eat, even at risk of paying later for their pleasure with aching stomachs. There were week-end picnics with friends who owned automobiles to pleasant spots in the distant countryside, where the children could swim; and in the dusk, when the fireflies began to flash and the Whip-poor-wills to call their names loudly, they would kindle a campfire and sit around it to eat supper. Later, they toasted marshmallows over the glowing coals.

Then, too, as the cherries and strawberries and peaches ripened, each in turn, there was plenty of work helping Mother make preserves for their bread next winter. On hot August afternoons, when the day's tasks were done, Kenneth and Lucille would put on their bathing suits and splash about in the cooling spray from the lawn-sprinkler — delightful sport! Afterward, they would dress and sit in the swing with Mother beneath

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the deep, cool shade of a great oak tree that grew in the dooryard, while she read them stories from a book, or the latest letters from Father. How the children loved to be read to!

They eagerly looked forward to their father's letters, which as a rule arrived every Wednesday morning. If a Wednesday passed without his letter, because he had been traveling too far from a post office, then there would be two letters the following week.

Father's letters were full of interest to his family. They told of the strange, white-walled cities he visited, where people spoke unfamiliar languages, and wore colorful clothes. They told of great mountains he had crossed; and how, after a long, hard climb, he looked down into the fiery mouth of a smoking volcano, and smelt its sulphurous fumes. He wrote of long journeys by train, and automobile, and mule-back over rough trails through great forests, with Indian porters to carry his cameras and equipment and provisions on their backs. He described queer animals, and birds with beautiful plumage and lovely songs. But he saw no Baltimore Orioles; they had all left the tropics to build their nests in the north at that season. However, he saw many orioles of other kinds, sweetest songsters brightly clad in gold and black. Although some sang more beautiful songs, none, he thought, wore plumage so delightfully colored as the oriole who sang in their own elm tree.

In one letter, he told how he had seen monkeys, and taken

snapshots of them as they jumped from tree to tree. In another, he wrote about an ant-eater his men had caught, and how he had photographed it, and later set it free.

"Oh, how I wish he had kept it to bring home to me! It would make such a nice pet!" exclaimed Lucille.

"Silly! It would scratch you whenever you picked it up," said Kenneth. "Didn't Father write that it had claws nearly two inches long, and he had to be very careful of them as he placed the animal in different poses?"

"That doesn't matter. I would train it to be very gentle, and it would not hurt me," replied his sister.

"Well, we shall all see the photographs of the ant-eater when Father returns," said Mother, to put an end to the argument.

"I can hardly wait until he gets back. How I wish I were with him!" exclaimed Kenneth.

Late one warm August afternoon, they had a pleasant surprise. Mr. Fargo, a <sup>good</sup>~~man~~ friend of the family, dropped in unexpectedly to call on them. He was old and gray now, and took life easily, but when younger he had been a great traveler and explorer. There seemed to be few places of importance he had not visited. He had an endless stock of stories about his adventures, and the children delighted to hear him. Of course, he was persuaded to stay for supper. Luckily, Mother had made peach pie that morning; and Kenneth went on his bicycle to fetch ice cream. They had a royal feast!

When the meal was over, Mother washed the dishes and every-



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body, including Mr. Fargo, helped to dry them. They tried to make him sit in the parlor and read the evening paper while they put things in order, but he insisted on helping, too. How many times had he washed and dried dishes, and cooked and washed clothes, and even sewed, when he traveled in wild places, he said. Lucille thought it would be funny to see a man wash clothes and mend them — her father never did.

"I'll bet a box of candy against a flower from the garden that he is doing it on this trip," said Mr. Fargo, and chuckled heartily.

When the dishes had been dried and arranged neatly on the shelves of the dresser, they all sat on the lawn beneath the big oak tree and talked of many things. Kenneth told Mr. Fargo how he had tied the orioles' nest up in the elm tree after the telephone linemen had cut it down; and how the parent orioles had come to take care of it in the new position; and how the young orioles had grown feathers and flown away.

"But I saw it first after the men cut it down," said Lucille. "If it hadn't been for me, the men would have thrown it into the truck with the branches and hauled it away to the dump."

"Well, you both deserve credit for saving the young orioles," said Mr. Fargo. "That is splendid! Soon the young orioles will be big and strong enough to fly south to the tropics where your father is. Something that owes its life to you — that is almost a part of you, you might say — will be taking the long journey to the tropics. That should

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be a thought to make you happy. It is almost the same as going yourselves."

"But it is not quite the same, Mr. Fargo," insisted Kenneth. "Oh, how I wish I could have gone with Father to the tropics!"

"You have plenty of time to see the tropics, lad, if you've a mind to," said the old man kindly. "I was nearly twice your age when I left my father's roof, and I've seen a good bit of the world in my day — a good bit of the world."

"Please, Mr. Fargo," said Lucille, "you've been nearly everywhere. Tell us more about the tropics. Tell us what the orioles will see when they fly southward."

"Yes, that's an idea," added Kenneth eagerly, "tell us what our orioles will see when they fly away from us."

The old man sat in silence for a minute, collecting his thoughts. Soon he spoke:

"Let us see. I suppose that first the father oriole, who has been too busy all summer raising his family to have time for it sooner, will perch in the top of the elm tree, or perhaps even on your window sill, to sing his thanks to you for saving his children and to say good-by. Then he will join other orioles, and they will fly southward. They will cross great rivers, and forests, and fields, and fly over big cities in the night. They will travel chiefly by night, so that they will be able to hunt food when they end each journey in the morning. They will fly tirelessly for many hours



over a vast body of water, and come at last to a most marvelous land — a most marvelous land.

"And what will they see there? So many wonderful things that I hardly know what to begin with: forests taller and vaster than any you have ever seen — huge ancient monuments of carved stone, standing silent and alone in their midst, guarding their secrets for ages — great mountains shooting smoke and red-hot rocks from their summits — cities that were old before anybody lived in this — birds: great scarlet macaws and tiny glittering hummingbirds scarcely bigger than insects, and gorgeous quetzals with long green tails — animals: monkeys, great prowling jaguars, sloths that hang upside-down from the branches of trees and eat leaves — flowers: orchids with lovely blossoms growing high in the treetops, trees much bigger than this old oak that drop all their leaves and cover themselves with a single glowing mass of bloom. What shall I start with?"

"The sloths!" exclaimed Lucille, who loved animals. "They must be such funny, upside-down creatures, living all their lives in the treetops.

"The volcanoes!" cried Kenneth, who had studied geography. "It must be wonderful to see a great mountain shooting up smoke like a steam engine."

"And Mr. Fargo," added their mother quietly, "you'll say just a little about the orchids, I hope, for my sake." She loved flowers.

Soon Mr. Fargo was talking away at a great rate, trying to tell about all the marvelous things he had seen on his

travels through the tropics. When he got started so, he did not always know when to stop. He talked far into the night. After a while, Lucille fell asleep beside him in the swing. Soon Kenneth was sleeping on the other side. He talked on and on, until even their mother began to doze. Finally, he became aware that the children's questions had long since stopped. Then he came to a halt in his story, and noticed that they were sleeping beside him.

"Oh! I'm sorry I have kept the children up beyond their bed-time. You really should have stopped me. Talking too much is, I fear, a common failing of old wanderers."

"What?" said Mrs. Colton somewhat rudely, suddenly aroused from her doze. "Oh! that's all right! They're really becoming big children to fall asleep sitting up. I have enjoyed everything you said, and I'm sure they have — until they fell asleep."

She was about to rouse the children and send them up to bed, but Mr. Fargo stopped her. He gently lifted Kenneth in his arms and carried him into the house, while their mother followed with Lucille. The children were so drowsy that they hardly awoke as they were undressed and tucked into bed.

## Chapter 3

## THE TRANSFORMATION

A few stray beams of early sunshine, finding their way through the dense foliage of the oak tree, fell into the children's bedroom through the open window. Kenneth awoke from happy dreams with sweet music in his ears. He lay a minute half awake, enjoying the clear notes and wondering where they came from. Then he rubbed his eyes and looked around. There on the window sill, outside the screen, standing right in a sunbeam was the glowing, orange-and-black form of the oriole, singing with all his might. The boy listened awhile enchanted, not daring to move lest the song cease. Then he reached across the passage-way to his sister's bed and shook her until she awoke.

"Lucille! Lucille!" he whispered, "wake up! Here is our oriole come to thank us for saving the lives of his children, and to say good-by, before he flies away to the tropics, just as Mr. Fargo said last night that he would."

Lucille awoke and listened, too, while the oriole continued to sing his sweetest notes. Presently she said: "Raise the screen, Ken. I'm sure he wants to come in."

"No, that would scare him away. Let's just lie here and listen."

They listened in silence a few minutes longer, while the oriole continued to whistle brightly.

"I'm sure he wants to come in," said Lucille at last. "If

you won't raise the screen, I will,"

And so she did, then jumped quickly back into bed.

The oriole stopped singing and hopped from the window sill to the bureau that stood close beside it, and from there to the white foot rail of Lucille's little iron bed. It was so hard and slippery that he almost lost his grip upon it and fell, but with a flip of his wings he recovered his balance and his dignity.

"I have come to thank you for saving my nestlings," he announced, "and to say good-by. Tomorrow I shall set forth on a long journey. I'm going to the tropics, where I live more than half the year. It is very pleasant here in summer when everything is green; but I don't like trees without leaves, and cold weather I simply cannot endure. But before I fly away, I would like to ask whether there is anything I can do to show my gratitude to you."

The children, sitting up in bed now, began to think hard. What could an oriole do for them?

Lucille was the first to speak. She had read about carrier pigeons. "Oh, Mr. Oriole, could you take a letter to our father? Just a tiny little note, that you could carry under a wing. He would be so happy to receive it that way."

"With pleasure, if it isn't too heavy. I have a long, hard journey to make. But how shall I recognize your father?"

"No! No!" cried Kenneth. "Take us with you to the tropics, Mr. Oriole. That will be much better."



"Silly!" said Lucille. "How can a bird carry a great big boy like you?"

The oriole cocked his head to one side and thought for a moment. Presently he said: "Yes, I could take you with me, but first I must make you orioles."

"Oh, do, Mr. Oriole, do make us orioles!" cried Kenneth. "What fun to be a bird and fly!"

Lucille was more sober-minded and less apt to be carried away by her enthusiasm. "But how could you change us into orioles?" she asked gravely.

"There is a special kind of caterpillar, that lives only on the service-berry bush, and if you eat three of them apiece, before breakfast, while I sing the Magic Incantation, you will become orioles. This is a secret that has been known in our family a long time. But it is only fair that I warn you that the flight to the tropics is very dangerous. Many of us who start out never reach our destination; many who arrive there never return. Perhaps you should at least ask your mother's permission, before you decide upon it. I am a parent myself, and I know how parents feel about such matters."

"Perhaps we should ask Mother," suggested Lucille.

"No! No!" cried Kenneth. "She may forbid us to go. Really, it can't be so dangerous. Father said before he left that there is no monster in Central America as dangerous as the automobile. Albert Stein was run over last week, and Jack's dog was killed only yesterday. Please, Mr. Oriole, do tell us where we can find those magic caterpillars."

"Wait!" commanded Mr. Oriole, "I'll be back in a few



minutes. "And he flew through the window and vanished.

"Indeed, I do think we should ask Mother's permission," insisted Lucille. "Things that are not dangerous for people may be dangerous for little birds. There are hawks, and cats, and snakes, and terrible storms, and owls at night."

"Well, if you're afraid you needn't go. But I'm going to the tropics to see Father — and oh! so many things! I shall have wings like an angel!"

While the children discussed the matter, the oriole returned with six caterpillars in his bill. They looked like green measuring worms; they were long and hung down on each side of his mouth like an old-fashioned mustache and really made quite a billful. The bird flew to Kenneth's bed and laid three beside him on the pillow, then placed the other three on Lucille's pillow.

"Eat them!" he said. "They're delicious."

"But if we eat them, how shall we ever become children again?" asked cautious Lucille.

"It will be quite simple," replied the oriole. "It will only be necessary to pluck off your feathers, and you will grow into children again."

Kenneth hesitated to put the caterpillars into his mouth. "Ugh, they're still squirming! I can't swallow them alive."

"Indeed, they're not in the least unpleasant," urged the oriole.

Kenneth was determined to go with the oriole. "I'll pretend they're medicine; I'll pretend they're bitter pills to

take," he said. "Pass me a glass of water, please, Lucille."

On warm summer nights, their mother placed two glasses of water, covered by a napkin, on the edge of the bureau at the foot of Lucille's bed. The girl removed the cover and handed one to her brother, who then put a caterpillar in his mouth and swallowed with a big gulp. It slipped down easily. Two more gulps took care of the other two caterpillars.

Lucille watched her brother intently, expecting to see him turn at once into an oriole.

"Be quick," the oriole cautioned her, "or the spell will not work. Swallow your caterpillars!"

So Lucille followed Kenneth's example, and took her green caterpillars like medicine.

"Now," commanded the oriole, "lie down, both of you, and cover your heads with your sheets."

"They did as they were told; and the oriole began to sing a low, sweet warble, which was the Magic Incantation." As he sang, the children felt themselves shrinking smaller and smaller, like a rubber ballon when the air escapes. Each top sheet sank lower and lower, until it lay almost flat on the bottom one, except for a small hump in the middle. Next they felt prickly all over, as though they suffered from heat rash. That was the feathers sprouting out from their skins. Then the oriole stopped singing.

Kenneth hopped out from beneath the sheet, no longer a boy but an oriole. Still afraid to trust himself to the air, he hopped across his bed, then over his sister's, then on to

the edge of the bureau. His eye caught a glowing orange image in the mirror. He cocked his head to one side to see it better; the image cocked its head to the same side. He raised his right wing; the image raised its left wing. Yes! that was he, just like Mr. Oriole, who stood on the window sill, watching intently.

"Oh! Lucille," the boy cried out in joy, "come quickly and look how beautiful we have become! We're just like Mr. Oriole."

Lucille emerged from beneath her sheet and joined her brother on the bureau. But what she saw in the mirror was quite different. Her plumage was grayish and yellowish, like that of a female oriole, far less brilliant than that of Mr. Oriole and her brother. For nearly a minute she gazed in silence into the glass, trying to make out what had happened to herself.

"It's not fair!" she cried out in anger. "It's not right that you should have such beautiful plumage and mine should be so ugly. I shan't go to the tropics in this hideous dress. I'll pluck out every last one of these nasty feathers and become Lucille again. Why did you treat me so unfairly, Mr. Oriole?"

"Indeed, I couldn't help it; it's not my fault at all," explained the bird. "When a boy oriole is more than a year old, he has orange-and-black feathers like mine; and a girl oriole has feathers like yours — that is all. I think you're quite pretty. You're very much like Mrs. Oriole, and I always admired her greatly."

"But Kenneth is not a grown-up man, and I don't see why



he should become a grown-up oriole. He ought to have a dull dress, like your children, and me."

"I see I have not given them enough caterpillars; they are still people inside," said the oriole to himself, and flew off to the service-berry bush by the stream in the woodlot to fetch more of them.

"I don't see why you need to be so ugly and make so much fuss," said Kenneth. "What difference does the color of your feathers make, so long as you can fly and go to the tropics with Mr. Oriole. I would gladly 'change feathers with you, if only I could undress as I used to be able to do when I was a boy."

"You're still a boy, a sloppy, careless boy who doesn't care how he looks," snapped Lucille, still in a bad humor.

By this time the oriole had returned with another billful of green caterpillars. He placed one in Lucille's mouth, just as though he were feeding one of his own young. Being a bird now, it tasted good to her, and she swallowed it readily. Then he offered one to Kenneth, who hesitated to accept it.

"You must eat more of these service-berry caterpillars," explained the oriole, speaking with his bill full. "You have become birds only on the outside and are still human children at heart. These will complete the change to orioles."

"But if we become orioles in our minds and hearts," objected Kenneth, "we might not recognize our father when we see him in the tropics; and we might not remember what we have seen when we return and pluck out our feathers to become

children again. I want to remember it all."

"You're a wise child," said the oriole. "Take just one more; it will not hurt you; and I will eat the rest"—which he promptly did. "Now we must go."

"But aren't we going to take any clothes and things?" asked Lucille, who had become more reconciled to her plumage after eating the fourth caterpillar.

One of the drawers of the bureau had been left partly open before they went to bed. Through the chink she could barely glimpse the contents, although, being now a bird, she could no longer open the drawer.

"Oh, my pretty, new, white dress with the lace and blue ribbons!" she cried. "I couldn't bear to go and leave it behind."

"Foolish!" said Kenneth. "What need have you of a dress now that you have feathers? They are much better; they are warm and they shed the water like a raincoat. Besides, you couldn't even lift your dress now. You ought to be glad we can go without any baggage. It's so much bother; Father said it is. Oh! what joy to travel without even school books!"

He was hopping up and down on the bureau scarf in his impatience to try his new wings and be off.



## Chapter 4

## THE DEPARTURE

The sun was rising higher into a clear sky and drying the dewdrops from the lawn and all the glowing flowers in the beds. Mr. Oriole was in a hurry to go.

"Come, now!" he said to the newly-made orioles, "we must fly to the woods and hunt insects for breakfast. I'm still very hungry, and I'm sure you must be, too."

As he said this, he flew out from the window sill, expecting Kenneth and Lucille to follow. But as they stood on the edge of the sill, looking down, the ground seemed a long way below. They were afraid, and held back. When he saw that they were not following him, the oriole circled around in the air and returned to them.

"Come! come!" he exclaimed impatiently. "What are you waiting for?"

"But you haven't yet taught us to fly, Mr. Oriole," Kenneth said humbly.

"It's not at all necessary," replied the oriole. "I never teach my own young. They fly fairly well as soon as they leave the nest, unless they are frightened out too soon by a snake or a squirrel. And the young woodpeckers fly from the moment they leave the hole in a dead tree where they grew up, although I'm sure they haven't enough room inside to practice flapping their wings. Just jump off and beat your wings. They will not let you fall."

With this the oriole took flight once more, eager to be off. Kenneth looked down at the ground again, and felt as he had felt when first he had stood on the edge of deep water at the swimming pool and been expected to jump in. But he did not wish his friend the oriole to think him a coward, so he set his bill hard together, instead of gritting his teeth, as he would have done the day before — and jumped off into space, flapping his wings desperately. He flapped them so hard that he rose sharply upward instead of falling.

O! the joy of flight, of feeling himself lifted and held up by the thin air, which never before had been able to support him; of feeling it press caressingly against his breast and the undersides of his wings, like a thing alive, to lift him higher and yet higher above the ground! This was better far than swimming; for a boy is lighter than water, and if only he lets his muscles relax he may stay afloat in it like a dead log.

It was better, too, than riding in an airplane, that time his father had stopped the car at a roadside flying field, and, after twice asking the man in charge whether it was all quite safe, had taken Mother and then both children up for a short circling flight over the countryside. Kenneth had thought he was going to be terribly afraid, and held tightly to the arms of his seat as the motor began to roar more loudly and the machine started forward. And he was a bit frightened as the airplane bumped rapidly over the landing strip. But as soon as it began to rise, and the earth seemed to fall away

beneath him, the machine flew so smoothly that he promptly forgot his fear in the interest of seeing the land spread out more and more widely beneath him, and houses and trees shrink gradually to the size of toys in a Christmas garden. It was almost like riding in a swiftly moving train or automobile —except when the airplane ran into a "hole" in the air and dropped suddenly ten feet, causing a sickening sensation in the pit of his stomach.

O! it was far, far more delightful to rise up easily and silently on his own wings; so delightful that all the boy that still remained in Kenneth wanted to shout loudly for joy. But he succeeded only in voicing bright, clear whistles, like those of the oriole.

When Lucille saw that her brother did not fall in the air, she followed, too. They circled around and over the big oak tree, just for the pleasure of feeling themselves in the air, then alighted upon an upper branch. They almost toppled over as they came down upon the branch, and had to clutch hard with their toes to save themselves from falling. Alighting on a perch was not as easy as it looked. They had to practice much before they could do it well.

While they rested on their high bough, they took a farewell look over the house and garden they knew so well. How different it all looked when viewed from the air with the eyes of a bird! Through the open kitchen window, they could see their mother standing at the sink, peeling peaches to mix with the cereal for their breakfast. A wave of shame surged



over them. Poor Mother! She tried so hard to make them happy, and now they were about to leave for a long while, without even saying good-by.

"We must tell Mother where we are going and say good-by," said Lucille. "We should have asked permission first."

"No, she may stop us," replied Kenneth, whose heart was set upon going to the tropics. He thought for a few moments, then added: "I know! We'll leave a note on the bureau telling her all about it. Father should be home next month, so she will not be alone very long."

He had read somewhere in a book about a boy who had left a note when he ran away from home. It would be just the right thing to do. He started at once to fly back to the bedroom to write the note. But after he had gone three or four wing-flaps, he suddenly remembered that he no longer had a hand to hold a pencil. Already he was discovering that while in some ways it is better to be a bird with wings, in others it is more convenient to be a boy with hands.

There was no choice left but to go to the kitchen window and say good-by with their own voices. They alighted on the sill outside the screen, where Kenneth sang sweetly to his mother. Lucille could utter only weaker notes that scarcely made a song. Their mother looked up and smiled a little, as though to herself, then went on paring and slicing the peaches. So the children had to leave their mother for many months without even a farewell kiss.

"It's all your fault. I told you we should ask permission



before we became orioles," said Lucille to her brother. She was angry again because he could sing better than she could.

But Mr. Oriole, who was growing hungrier and hungrier, hurried them off before Kenneth could think of a good answer to make to his sister. The oriole led them across roads and over houses and vacant lots to open country, where his mate and three young were waiting for him in a strip of pleasant woodland beside a river.

Here Mr. Oriole introduced Lucille and Kenneth to Mrs. Oriole and the youngsters. Then each of the young orioles came forward in turn to thank the children for saving their lives. They were very embarrassed; and so were Kenneth and Lucille, for they did not know what to reply. Finally Kenneth blurted out, in oriole language, "Oh, that's all right!" A little later he was sorry; it did not seem the right thing to say. Still, perhaps it was better than "You're welcome" when you were thanked for saving a life, as though you had been thanked for half an apple or a piece of candy.

When these tedious formalities were over, much to everybody's relief, they began the serious work of the day: hunting food. There were so many bugs of all kinds in the woods in summer, the children had noticed, that they thought it would be easy to satisfy themselves. Presently Lucille spied a big red-and-black bug and was quite pleased with herself; but when she plucked it from the leaf with the tip of her bill, it made such a nasty odor that she dropped it in disgust.

Mrs. Oriole, who was close by at the moment, explained to

Lucille that many brightly colored insects were unfit to be eaten; their brightness was a means of warning birds that they tasted bad. The green and <sup>the</sup> brown caterpillars and winged insects and spiders were the best food, but these were the hardest to detect on the green leaves or brown bark where they lived. Kenneth and Lucille hunted as hard as they could, but they lacked practice finding insects, and would have become very hungry if the parent orioles had not fed them from time to time, just as though they had been their own fledglings. Now that the brother and sister had become orioles, they actually enjoyed eating things like spiders and green caterpillars! Only yesterday, the very thought of putting such things into their mouths would have filled them with disgust.

In the afternoon, Kenneth happened to find in a bush a big, green striped caterpillar that he thought would make an excellent meal. But as he touched the fat creature with the tip of his bill, it surprised and frightened him by suddenly shooting out from near its head two long yellow horns that had not been visible before. At the same time, it sent forth such a disagreeable smell that he was glad enough to leave it alone. Both child-orioles suffered many disappointments that day.

They had also to learn how to care for their feathers. If they had thought about it at all, they had supposed that feathers were a suit of clothes you put on once and then forgot ~~about~~. Now they discovered how mistaken such an idea is. As they flitted through the trees searching for food, their

plumage became disarranged. Soon they noticed how much attention the orioles and other birds gave to the care of their feathers while they rested, and began to imitate them. Each feather had to be carefully smoothed out and put in place with the tip of the bill. Kenneth, who was still very much a boy at heart, found this bothersome—there were other things he would rather do. It was like having to comb his hair on mornings when he was in a great hurry to run out and play, only now the combing had to be done all over his body, with a bill that could not accomplish so much at a single stroke. Nevertheless, he preened conscientiously, for he was proud of his new orange-and-black suit, and did not wish to disgrace himself and his companions by letting it become disheveled from neglect.

Lucille enjoyed preening her plumage and took pleasure in its neat appearance. She was becoming reconciled to her duller dress, for its subdued shades were really beautiful when you looked at them closely—feathers are always beautiful. Still, it was while arranging her plumage that she was most jealous of her brother. To smooth out those glowing orange-and-black feathers would have given her so much more pleasure!

The newly-made orioles had so much to learn that Mr. Oriole decided to delay their departure a few days, until they were ready to fly southward with him. Each day they found food with less effort. By practicing among the trees, they learned to fly more swiftly, and turn more sharply, and break their speed with a little upward slant as they alighted



on a branch. They learned the meaning of the sharp notes by which orioles and other small birds warn of the approach of a hawk or other danger; and they obeyed these signals instantly and without question, dashing into the nearest sheltering foliage, and staying there motionless until the peril had passed.

The woods were now full of birds of many kinds; but few sang in these warm days of late summer; and a careless person might walk a long way beneath the trees without seeing any of them, except perhaps a brilliant flash of scarlet as a tanager flew overhead. Only the little White-eyed Vireos among the willows and alders beside the river were in a songful mood, tirelessly repeating their odd, breezy verses. Sometimes a red Cardinal sang a brief song, and now and then an oriole sent forth a bright droplet of sound.

Many of the birds were busy trying to satisfy the hunger of clamorous broods of fledglings already well feathered. Others had shaken off their young, now well able to take care of themselves, and sought their own food in silence, trying to regain the strength they had lost during weeks of self-sacrificing devotion to their young families. They were also molting, putting on fresh new plumage for their southward flight. The youngsters, too, hunted diligently, to build up their strength and lay on fat that would provide energy for the long flight ahead of them.

Kenneth and Lucille were delighted to meet among the trees many small, bright birds they had never noticed before. Now



that they were birds themselves, they could come as close to the strangers as they desired, without frightening them away. Although many birds of different kinds might be hunting in the same tree for the same kind of food, they seldom quarreled. Only rarely would one fly at another, who would flit aside and so avoid a fight. The boys at Kenneth's school did not get along half so well together.

The foliage of the sour gum trees was already turning red. The acorns were fast filling out, and some of the earliest were already dropping from their cups. Goldenrod was coming into blossom, and slender wands of silver-rod were raised in the woodland glades. Early asters were opening their bright blue eyes with yellow pupils. In marshy openings in the woods, cardinal flowers still held up their spires of blazing scarlet. But summer was waning, autumn close at hand.

Those were happy days full of interest for Kenneth and his sister, learning how to do so many new things, and seeing all old familiar objects with different eyes. In the cool of the evening, Mr. Oriole led them to roost with his family in the dense foliage of a red cedar tree, where they were completely screened from the eyes of wandering owls searching for tender birds to devour. Here they would turn back their heads and bury them in the fluffed-out feathers of their shoulders, and be asleep as soon as it grew dark. Here among cool green foliage they never tossed sleeplessly, as upon the warm mattresses of their little white beds in the children's room at home, on such hot August nights as these. And they slept sweetly and soundly until dawn.

## Chapter 5

## SOUTHWARD!

One night, about a week after Kenneth and Lucille had become orioles, they were awakened by gentle pecks. It was dark among the foliage of the cedar tree; but the evening star still hung brightly above the crest of the western hill, and the last faint glow of sunset had scarcely faded from the sky. They had fallen asleep only a short while before and were exceedingly drowsy.

"What's that?" Kenneth asked sleepily.

"It's I," replied Mr. Oriole. "Come! We must leave now for the tropics."

"But it's not morning yet, and I'm so sleepy," complained Lucille.

"It's still a long time until morning, but we mostly travel by night," explained the oriole. "Come! Come! The wind in the palm trees is calling me from far, far away; and I hear the bright songs of my cousins who dwell always in the land where snow never falls. I'm thirsty for the sweet nectar of the white banana flowers, and hungry for the little black berries of the cow's-tongue tree. I can't wait longer, for the call is too strong. Come with me!"

Kenneth had forgotten what Mr. Fargo had told him about the orioles' traveling by night, and supposed that they would start their journey to the tropics some fine morning, when the dew-laden meadows sparkled in the early sunshine, and

that he would be thrilled at the moment of taking wing for the long and dangerous voyage. But now he was too sleepy to feel thrilled about anything. He, too, felt the call of the tropics, but not as strongly as the orioles, because he had not eaten enough service-berry caterpillars to make him wholly an oriole inside. But mechanically, as though he flew in his sleep, he followed Mr. Oriole and his family; and Lucille went with her brother.

They rose above the treetops into the still, warm air of the September night, then flew with their tails toward the Pole Star. Mr. Oriole guided himself by the constellations, just as his ~~his~~ offspring could do without being taught. He felt an invisible thread pulling him irresistibly toward the lands where palm trees grow and forests are always green. The young orioles, hatched only three months before, felt as strongly as their parents this mysterious attraction drawing them southward to a land they had never seen. They might just as well have traveled alone. But because Lucille and Kenneth were not truly orioles, they could not tell directions by stars continuously changing their places in the sky, and they would have gone astray if they had not closely followed the others.

The stars twinkled above them as they flew through the night, and below them fireflies made starry heavens of all the open fields. All around them were other birds flying in the same direction, southward toward the lands where birds fear neither hunger nor great cold. Some flew more swiftly



and shot ahead of the orioles; others went more slowly and fell behind. The soft cries of the little wanderers sounded back and forth through the darkness. Movement and the rush of cooling air over their faces had now thoroughly aroused the child-orioles, and they felt the thrill of traveling to unknown lands in such strange, beautiful company.

They passed over lonely farmhouses, standing darkly amid the fields, with here and there a broad beam of light streaming out through an open window upon the surrounding lawns and shrubbery, for people were still sitting up and the night was warm. They flew over highways, which gleamed whitely in the headlights of speeding cars, to become dark again when they had passed. Once a car, climbing a steep hill, shot the powerful beam of its headlights right into the eyes of the winged children, blinding them and making them lose sight of their guide. But in an instant it veered away, and they flew on steadily as before.

Then, far below them, a train rushed through the night, with lights gleaming brightly from its windows in long rows, and its long plume of smoke lit up from moment to moment by flashes from the locomotive. Next, they came to a great city, and flew for many minutes above its miles and miles of streets, marked out by countless lights standing in rows between the dark roofs of the buildings. Soon they became aware that they were flying directly toward a tall tower, which rose high into the night above all the surrounding buildings. The white shaft



gleamed dazzlingly in the beams of big electric floodlights, which made the surrounding air seem darker than before. The strong light caught and held the eyes of the orioles. They could see nothing but the dazzling tower, and, without thinking what they were doing, Kenneth, Lucille, and the young orioles flew toward it.

"Steady! Follow me! Don't dare to look at that light; look only at me," Mr. Oriole commanded sharply. He had made the journey many times and knew its dangers. His stern command broke the fatal spell under which the youngsters had fallen. Fixing their eyes upon him, they flew safely by the tower. But after they had passed it, Lucille could not resist turning her head to look behind for a moment. In that instant, she saw a small bird shoot out of the darkness and dash against the stone shaft hard enough to stun itself. Then it fell, down, down into the night. With her heart beating faster, Lucille turned quickly and fixed her eyes steadily upon the dark figure of her guide. She said nothing, but she could never forget what in that brief moment she saw.

Presently they were flying over open country again, and all felt safer. As it grew later, fewer and fewer of the scattered farmhouses showed lights in their windows, for people were turning them out and going to bed. Kenneth could not help thinking that their mother must be still sitting up, all alone in their home so far back, waiting for their return, crying perhaps. Now, for the first time, he was sorry that he had come away without even asking permission. He wished he could

turn around and fly straight to his mother and comfort her. But it was too late; he could only follow his guide through the starlight.

After they had flown for hours, the waning moon rose above the flat country on their left, and shed its pale light upon a range of ~~great~~ mountains rising on their right. Now the winged travelers could see more clearly what lay below them. Soon they flew over a great river, winding like a broad ribbon through the sleeping land, with thin white mists stretching here and there along its wooded shores.

On and on the orioles sped through the night toward the lands where their ancestors had dwelt long ages ago. Their wings beat steadily, they hardly grew tired. At last, when the moon had climbed until it stood almost overhead, the edge of the sky on their left began to brighten. By degrees it grew lighter and ~~lighter~~; the clouds lying low over the flat land were tinted with rose and with orange the color of Mr. Oriole's breast; the half moon began to look pale.

Now they could distinguish clearly the separate trees in a strip of woodland over which they were passing. Suddenly Mr. Oriole circled, then half closed his wings and dropped almost straight down from high in the air. Only as he neared the treetops did he spread his wings widely and, with a whizzing sound, level off to alight in a tall pine. Mrs. Oriole and the youngsters followed, but Lucille and Kenneth hesitated to take such a dangerous-looking plunge. Fearing to lose sight of their guide among the many trees below them if they delayed,

they dropped as the others had done. <sup>¶</sup> All rested in the pine tree until the sun rose and the day grew bright. Then they searched for breakfast, for they had become very hungry. They traveled by night so they could use the day for finding food, and would not have to pass a day and a night together without eating. Great hawks that can spiral upward on currents of sun-warmed air, then glide forward on outspread, motionless wings, may travel for hours without exerting themselves to flap. Since they expend so little energy, they can continue their long migratory journeys day after day without eating. But small birds that must beat their wings constantly as they fly need much food on the way.

Through most of the morning the orioles searched for food in the woodland. Then they rested through the warmest hours of the day and put their plumage in order by preening. In the afternoon they hunted actively for food again. After nightfall, they resumed their southward journey.



Chapter 6  
STORM AT SEA

Early one morning, after a long night's flight, the winged travellers came to rest in some trees near a great body of water. The boughs of the trees were draped with Spanish moss, which hung in long, gray streamers that waved gracefully in the breezes that blew off the water. The trees were full of birds of many colors, most of them smaller than the orioles, who had made the same journey as they, and were waiting to cross the Gulf of Mexico.

As Kenneth and his sister looked over the water, they could see no land beyond it, only a long, level line, where the sky seemed to meet the water. This horizon curved evenly around from the shore on their right to the shore on their left, in one great, even sweep. They had never before been to the seashore and were amazed to find the sea so vast and empty. They wondered, too, where they would turn next, for the water was straight ahead in the direction of their flight.

"What will we do <sup>next</sup> now?" Kenneth asked Mr. Oriole.

"Fly straight onward, as we have been doing."

"Over the water?"

"Yes! Why not?"

"Is it far to the other side?" asked Lucille.

"Yes, it is very far. We must fly all night and through much of the next day, without anywhere to rest. But we can do it, as I have done many times before. Beyond the water



lie the lands where it is always summer."

"Aren't you afraid, Kennie dear?" asked Lucille when they were out of Mr. Oriole's hearing. "I wish we could go back to Mother and not have to cross that terrible water. Suppose our wings grew tired in the middle of it. Then what would we do?"

Kenneth admitted that he was a bit afraid, but he would not turn back now. Across the Gulf lay the tropics; the land beyond would be Mexico, he thought, for he remembered his geography. Next came Guatemala, where their father was. Soon they would see him, and all the marvelous things he had written about. The thought gave him courage.

For two days they lingered near the sea, eating well and resting from the long journey they had already made. They slept at night in a live-oak tree heavily laden with the Spanish moss. Then one evening, half an hour after sunset, Mr. Oriole felt it was time to continue southward. He aroused his companions. Together they rose into the air and set their course boldly out over the open water.

The stars twinkled brightly above them, and their reflections glittered below in the water ruffled by soft breezes into little dancing wavelets. The night was calm and fair, promising a prosperous passage across the Gulf. It was so caressing and beautiful that the winged children forgot the fear they had expected they would feel at the moment of setting forth to cross that vast expanse of water. Behind them the broad, sandy beach formed a long, light-colored band, beyond which

the low-lying land stood darkly against the sky. Before them were only the stars and the open sea.

On and on they flew, until the dark belt of land behind them shrank to the breadth of a hair, then vanished. Sky above, water below; stars in the sky and their images dancing in the sea; that was all they saw. It made Kenneth and Lucille feel closer to the orioles than ever before. They were all as one now; all facing the same perils in that vast emptiness. If the orioles, guiding themselves by the constellations, had suddenly vanished, the two child-orioles would not have known which way to turn to reach the nearest shore.

After they had flown for many miles, they saw clouds banked over the water ahead, blotting out the southern stars. As they continued onward, the clouds rose higher and higher, until the sky was covered with them, and not a single guiding star could be seen. Soon the night became so intensely dark that the birds could not see each other a few inches away. They could keep together only by listening to the sound of the air rushing through each other's wings, and by the calls they continually uttered.

The wind, too, was blowing harder and harder. If they had been on the deck of a ship, the birds would have felt the strong gale blowing from the southeast and lashing up an angry sea. If they had been flying over land, with objects below by which they could tell their direction and speed, they would have noticed that they were hardly moving forward at all, but rather being borne slowly toward their right.

But since they were flying blindly through the pitch-black night, moving through the moving air at just the same speed as before, they hardly noticed the wind, except when it came in uneven gusts that flicked them sideways or suddenly held them back. But Mr. Oriole, who was a seasoned traveler, felt that they were not making progress, and warned his companions that they must fly harder or they would be driven back.

Now the lightning began to flash, writhing like swift, fiery serpents through the dark, massed clouds so close above them. The sudden blinding light revealed how rough the sea had become, heaving up in great, foam-crested billows that seemed to reach hungrily toward the little wanderers, as though to pull them down into the surging water. They were flying low now, for the wind was not quite so strong near the water as higher in the air. Sometimes they felt the sting of salt spray driven sharply into their faces.

The flashes of lightning were followed by long, rolling peals of thunder. How loud and frightful they sounded, rumbling on and on over that empty, angry sea! The sudden darkness following the flash of light made it even more difficult for the birds to see their companions; the noise of the thunder drowned all the sounds they made. Without eyes or ears to guide them, they would become separated from each other, and fly fearfully alone until the next flash of lightning revealed where their companions were.

Then the rain fell in big, heavy drops that came thick and fast, beating the birds down toward the waves that reach-



ed up as though to seize them. It seemed that they would never be able to save themselves, creatures so small and weak, in the midst of so much water and darkness and tempest, many miles from land. The winged children would have wept if the struggle to keep with their guides had left them time to think about their great danger.

Then a flash of lightning showed Kenneth that he was flying alone with Mr. Oriole and one of the youngsters. Lucille and Mrs. Oriole and the other two young orioles had vanished amid the storm. A great fear and loneliness rushed over him. He tried to tell his companion what had happened, but he needed all his breath for flying. Doubtless Mr. Oriole had also seen that the others had disappeared. In any case, nothing could be done about it.

Soon another lightning flash revealed a winged form flying some distance ahead of Kenneth. Could that be his sister? He tried to beat his wings harder to overtake it, but before he could flap them twice the night was black as coal again. Soon another flash; and by its light he saw that the bird ahead had abandoned the struggle to stay alive and was falling down into the waves. He was not sure whether it was an oriole or some other bird.

He was sick at heart, and dying of weariness, and trying to keep on beating wings that felt as though at any moment they would drop from his body. How he longed for rest, to fold his weary limbs and drop, drop down to softness and

warmth and repose! But the sea below looked so cold and angry and terrible! It was even more forbidding than the sky filled with rain and tempest and lightning and noise. Until the end, he must struggle valiantly to keep above the grasp of those fearful waves.

Finally, after what seemed like days and weeks of tempest, the storm began to abate. The rain fell more slowly; lightning flashed less often; the wind blew less fiercely.

"Courage!" called Mr. Oriole cheerfully. "These thunderstorms do not last long. This isn't the worst of them I've been through."

Soon the rain stopped, but the sky above remained dark and threatening. They flew on and on through the darkness, Kenneth and Mr. Oriole together. The third young oriole had vanished into the night.

Then, at long last, the sky began to grow less dark on their left wing. Slowly the pale light crept over the sky. There were no cheerful hues of sunrise, rosy and golden and orange, but only the gray, sullen light seeping through the dark clouds that spread over the sea.

As the dawn grew brighter, Kenneth looked eagerly for some sign of land, for some sight of his lost companions. But he and Mr. Oriole were flying side by side through an emptiness such as he had never imagined. Below them was the gray sea, wrinkled into long, smooth billows that last night's storm had left upon its face.

Everywhere the sea seemed to end and to meet the sky at exactly the same distance from them, in a level line that swept completely around them, a circle as perfect as ever Kenneth had drawn with his compass at school, but so vast that a whole city might have been set down within it, with room to spare. As they flew swiftly onward, the huge circle seemed to glide onward with them, beneath that dull, leaden sky. Fly as hard as they would, they could never get beyond its center. The wizard who had drawn that immense circle on the sea had by some magic spell bound them in its exact center. They could never escape from it!

Now at last Kenneth's stout heart failed him; he felt trapped and too weary to fly another mile. "Oh! Mr. Oriole, I can't go any farther," he gasped.

"You must not give up now, when you have done so nobly and there is rest in sight," replied the oriole. "Hold on just a little longer."

"Oh! do you see land? I can't," said Kenneth.

"Not land, but one of those big floating houses that men make, on which we can rest for a while."

"Where?"

"Just a little to the right of straight ahead. We'll be there very soon, We shall rest for a time, then fly on to the land."

Kenneth looked hard in the direction that his companion had indicated, and could barely distinguish a small, dark object that seemed to float just on the curving line where the water met the sky. It was the funnel of a steamship, with a plume of dark smoke rising above it. All the rest of the great



ship lay down below the line of the horizon; only a bird's sharp eyes could have detected the small part that was visible at so great a distance.

Kenneth's courage rose at sight of some solid object in the midst of that huge emptiness of sky and sea. Mr. Oriole shifted the course slightly, and they flew directly toward the ship. As they approached it, more and more of the vessel rose up out of the water. Soon they could see the great black hull rocking up and down on the waves. Then they could distinguish the portholes in its sides, and a few people on the decks. In less than an hour after they had first sighted the ship, they flew into the rigging high above the upper deck and perched upon a cable.

Now at last they could rest their poor wings, that had been beating without pause for more than twelve hours. O, the sweetness of that rest, of feeling something solid beneath them after their long battle with the elements!

## Chapter 7

### AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

The ship on which Kenneth and Mr. Oriole had taken refuge was rolling from side to side in the high waves. On their lofty perch in the rigging, the orioles swung back and forth, so that now they could look down and see the waves beneath them on one side of the ship, now they were tossed the other way and looked down upon the water on the opposite side. Had Kenneth still been a boy, he probably would have been made sick by the movement; but to a bird it was much like perching upon a high bough tossed by a strong wind.

When they had rested a while and felt less exhausted, they remembered their missing companions.

"Do you think they could have fallen into the sea?" asked Kenneth, a great fear clutching at his heart.

"Mrs. Oriole flies quite as well as myself, and my children are already strong and self-reliant," replied the oriole. "I think it likely that after they became separated from us in the dark, each set his own course for the land. I expect we'll see them later."

"But Lucille?" persisted Kenneth, who was frightened anew by the care his friend had taken to avoid mentioning her.

"Tell me, when we flew through the night, did you feel something inside pulling you, pulling you, always toward the south?"

"Sometimes I thought I did, but I wasn't sure," replied Kenneth.

"It's all my fault," said Mr. Oriole. "I should have insisted that you eat more of those service-berry caterpillars, to make you orioles through and through."

"Then you believe that Lucille lost her way? Oh, Mr. Oriole, don't say that!" Now Kenneth remembered that it was he who had persuaded his sister to eat the caterpillars without first asking their mother. And it was he, too, who had objected to taking the additional caterpillars Mr. Oriole had brought, for he wished to see things and remember them as a boy. His heart felt even heavier than his tired wings. Oh! why had he been so stubborn? It was all his fault, not the oriole's.

"No, she might very well have followed my wife or one of the youngsters," said the oriole. "Do not give up hope. I expect we shall meet them on a plantation where we go every year."

They perched aloft in silence for a while longer. Soon Kenneth became aware that he was hungry and very thirsty. Chiefly he felt a burning thirst. Looking down, he noticed little pools of clear water in the gutter that ran around the foredeck below him. He suggested to his companion that they fly down and drink, for he could endure his thirst no longer. The oriole looked carefully around to make sure there was no man on the foredeck, then down they flew to drink. They stood beside a tiny pool that looked clean and eagerly dipped in



their bills. At the first sip they found that the water tasted bitter, for much salt spray from the high waves had mixed with the rain water.

"It's all right," said Kenneth, striving to be manly and hide his disappointment. "I'll drink it anyway."

"No, not another drop!" commanded Mr. Oriole sternly, as though he were talking to his own children. "It's sea water. If you drink it you will die."

So they flew up to rest on a coil of rope above the fore-castle, and gazed sorrowfully over that vast expanse of water, not one drop of which would serve to allay their burning thirst.

Kenneth had never before been on a ship, and if he had not been so tired and hungry and thirsty and worried about his sister, he would have loved to explore it from end to end, seeing how it was driven and guided, and examining all the marvelous things it contained. In the center was a part like a great house, with many rooms for the passengers, and halls, and stairways to go up and down between the different stories. All around the house were broad decks like porches, where the passengers walked and played games, or sat in easy chairs to chat, read, or watch the sea. But not many passengers were on deck so early in the morning. Some were inside, lying on their berths and feeling miserable, for last night's storm had made them seasick.

A few of the hardier passengers were walking about the decks, watching the great waves sweep past the ship, and enjoying the motion as it rose and fell to them like a thing

alive. Presently one spied the two beautiful orioles resting far up in front. He called an acquaintance to look, too; and when other people saw these gazing intently toward the bow, they also came to learn what was there. Before long most of the passengers on deck were looking at the orioles.

"Poor birds!" exclaimed the captain, who had joined the knot of passengers, "they have been exhausted by last night's storm. Now they will drink salt water and die."

Standing near the captain with her chin on the rail was a lovely little girl with wide, serious, brown eyes and honey-colored hair. She thought it would be a pity to allow such handsome birds to die from drinking salt water. So she went inside and asked a steward for a dish, and filled it with cool drinking water, and took it out on deck. She brought also a piece of bread and a banana. Then she asked the captain if she might go forward to the birds. He said "yes," if she would be careful not to fall.

When Kenneth saw the little girl approach with water and food he could hardly believe his eyes. It was Alice Nichols, one of their best friends, who had gone to Mexico to visit her aunt, and was now on her way home. How glad he was to see a familiar face so far from home! In his happiness at meeting Alice, he forgot for a moment that he was thirsty. The girl set the dish of water down on the deck, and scattered bread crumbs around it, and opened the banana and laid it beside the dish. Mr. Oriole and Kenneth went at once to the dish, and dipped their bills deeply into the precious water, then

raised their heads to let the cooling drops flow down their parched throats. O, the delight of that first drink after their terrible night! Again and again they dipped their bills and lifted their heads to make the water flow down, until at last they were satisfied. Then they ate bread crumbs and the banana.

A little Yellow Warbler and two pretty American Redstarts, who had also become exhausted battling the storm and had settled on other parts of the ship, saw the orioles at their meal and came to share it. There was enough for all; and all ate in friendship together, while Alice looked on quietly with her big, kind, brown eyes.

Presently the girl broke some bread crumbs in her hand and held it toward the birds. At first, none of them paid any attention to this move. Then Kenneth remembered what a good heart Alice had, and how she could not bear to hurt even a creature so small as an ant or a worm. Certainly, she would not harm him now that he was a bird; and it would not be fair to disappoint her when she had been so kind to them. So he perched upon her wrist while he picked bread crumbs from her hand. She bent over and kissed him gently on the head. Then Kenneth was so happy that he forgot his weariness and the great dangers they had passed through.

Meanwhile, many of the passengers and crew had gathered round, marveling at what they saw. "Mind that none of you men harm these birds," the captain said sharply to the crew. He said nothing directly to the passengers, but he meant them



to hear this, too.

In the crowd was another girl about Alice's age, in a blue dress. When she saw the oriole eating from Alice's hand, she begged some bread from her, and held out her hand with crumbs in it, as Alice had done. But neither Kenneth nor the other birds went to her, because they were all afraid that she might try to catch them. Kenneth knew that she had not thought about saving the lives of the exhausted travelers, but only wanted to show off before the people. And the passengers wondered why the beautiful oriole went to one of the little girls and not the other.

Kenneth longed to be able to tell Alice who he was, and all the wonderful things that had happened since she left home. Although he could still understand his own language, he could no longer speak it, for an oriole is a musical bird that lacks the speaking tongue of a parrot or a crow. Then he reflected that if he could talk to Alice, she would doubtless<sup>ask</sup> about her playmate, Lucille. What could he tell her then? What message could he send with her to his mother? No, it was better far that he could not talk to her!

After they had rested several hours on the ship and felt greatly refreshed, Mr. Oriole told Kenneth that they must fly onward again, for the vessel was carrying them off their course. Kenneth had overheard the captain tell one of the passengers that the nearest land was more than a hundred miles away. It seemed such a long distance to fly over the water, after having traveled all night. For a moment, he felt like plucking

out his oriole's feathers then and there, so that he might become a boy again and go home with Alice and her mother. He had already passed through more toils and perils than he had expected. But it would not be manly to turn back after having come so far. And if his sister were still alive, he must find her at all costs.

They flew up into the air and set their course toward the south, guided by the sun, which was now breaking through the clouds. When the Yellow Warbler and the two American Redstarts saw the larger birds fly off, they set out with them. Alice, who was watching from the deck and saw them fly away, waved her hand to them and hoped they would safely reach the land.

As they winged away, the ship gradually shrank in size and sank below the curving surface of the water, until at last, when Kenneth looked back, he could see only the plume of smoke, very faint in the distance, rising above the rim of the sea. Now once more they were flying in the center of a vast, empty circle of water, which moved onward just as fast as they did, so that they could never escape from its exact center, beat their wings as hard as they would. Only now most of the clouds had blown away; the sun shone warmly; and the sky above was a deeper and brighter blue than Kenneth had seen it before. And the sea below was such a wonderful blue, deep and intense, that he never tired looking down at it.

From time to time, he saw a school of flying fish rise above the water. Their backs were the same marvelously deep blue as the sea, and their bellies were white. Each would

spread its broad side fins like wings, and go gliding along a good way, just above the crests of the waves, into which it kicked its tail to push itself forward. But since it never flapped its fins, it could not really fly like a bird, and before long it would fall clumsily back into the sea.

Once they passed over a school of dolphins. The water was so clean and transparent that Kenneth saw them clearly down below. They were as big as the red canoe in which he sometimes paddled on the river at home, and had mottled skins, and queer broad tails that extended from side to side instead of up and down like those of a true fish. At intervals one would jump clear of the water, and open a wide round hole in the back of its neck, and puff out a column of air and mist, then suck in fresh air, tightly close the breathing hole, and sink beneath the water again — all in less time than it takes to tell this, and while swimming onward almost as fast as the birds flew. Kenneth was sorry when they fell behind.

From time to time, they saw ~~a~~ sea birds, white or brown or black, most of them much bigger than the orioles. The big ones soared and circled about, while the little black <sup>storm-</sup>petrels with white rumps flitted above the crests of the waves, as though it did not make the slightest difference to them whether they ever reached land or not. They found their food on the open sea, and were not, like the orioles and their companions, in a desperate hurry to reach the friendly land with its food and fresh water and rest. Kenneth envied them.

There was so much to see by day, even far out on the



water, that Kenneth regretted that they did not always travel in the daylight. It did not seem long before a low, dark band began to rise up slowly above the rim of the circle in whose center they flew, straight ahead. Soon they could distinguish the forms of the trees — trees such as Kenneth had never beheld, except in pictures. From the top of a tall and very slender trunk, the huge feathery leaves stood out in all directions, making a round head.

Then a long band of gleaming white sand became visible in front of the trees. As they came nearer, they could see that the deep blue of the water changed to a beautiful light turquoise as it met the shore. Tired as he was, Kenneth's heart beat faster. Then, at last, he flew with Mr. Oriole into the top of one of the odd-looking trees that leaned out over the white sand. He had reached a tropical shore, and was resting in the crown of a coconut palm. He was already far south in Mexico.

## Chapter 8

## KENNETH FINDS HIS FATHER

For a while Kenneth and Mr. Oriole rested among the long, slender green ribbons of the palm leaves, which rustled soothingly as light breezes tossed the great fronds. The trees near the shore were full of orioles and other small birds who had escaped the perils of the same long, hard journey that Kenneth and his guide had made, and were now busy seeking food, for all were exceedingly hungry. Whenever one came near, Kenneth would ask whether it had seen Mrs. Oriole and his sister. Some replied with a curt "No!". Others passed on without pausing to answer. They were too tired and hungry to be polite, and soon Kenneth became discouraged and stopped asking them.

Presently a pair of small blue-headed birds with a yellow spot on each wing alighted close beside him in the coconut palm. They lived here all year, and were neither weary from travelling nor in a hurry. They looked so cheerful and friendly that Kenneth plucked up courage to ask whether they had seen ~~saw~~ his lost sister. One of the Yellow-winged Tanagers politely inquired how they could recognize Lucille, and Kenneth tried to describe her to them. But there were many other Baltimore Orioles among the trees; and Kenneth, to his dismay, discovered that he could not tell how she differed from the others. It would have been so much easier if she were still a girl, and he could describe her by the color of her

hair and eyes, her age and height and the clothes she wore. After this, he realized that it would be useless to ask other birds whether they had seen Lucille. He must find her himself.

When Mr. Oriole and Kenneth had caught their breaths and rested a while, they joined other travelers hunting food, for they were famished. Kenneth looked longingly at the great, green coconuts, each far bigger than himself, that hung among the leaves of the palm tree in huge clusters that a man could hardly lift. He knew that inside was sweet milk and delicious food— at least, it had tasted good to him while he was still a boy. But how was a bird to break through that <sup>tough</sup> ~~hard~~ and very thick husk, then the woody shell, to reach the meat inside? He had to be content with the insects he could find among the clusters of little, white, woody flowers that grew higher on the tree.

When the travelers had slept and eaten and slept again, they felt strong enough to continue southward. They flew for many miles high above a wild, flat, wooded country with a great river flowing through it. When at last they reached the mountains that rose beyond the plains, Mr. Oriole told Kenneth that their long journey was almost finished.

One day they rested and searched for food in the forest on a steep mountainside. Kenneth had never seen trees so big. He used to think that the oak outside his window at home was a very big tree; but in this forest some were twice as tall,



with splendid straight trunks. Their lowest branches were often higher than the topmost twig of his oak tree. He was surprised to see that some of these trees were oaks, too, for they bore acorns, but such enormous acorns as he had never imagined — they were as big as walnuts! From the tall trees hung huge woody vines, some with stems as thick as Kenneth's waist when he was still a boy.

Upon the thicker boughs in the treetops grew many kinds of curious plants. A few had beautiful flowers that he thought must be orchids. They made him think of his mother. He wondered how she was, and wished he could take some of the prettiest blossoms to her, she loved them so. Other plants that perched upon the trees had long, narrow leaves arranged in a circle, forming a huge cup that held rain water. They belonged to the pineapple family and were a great convenience to the birds, who could drink and bathe here in the treetops, without flying down to a stream.

On the side of this mountain, the trees had been cut away in a narrow line that wound from the river at its foot right up to the summit. To Kenneth, peering down from the treetops, it looked as though a deep, narrow trench had been cut through the forest. At the bottom of the trench was a narrow band of brown mud, with a tangle of low bushes and vines growing on either side. Kenneth was puzzled by this chasm winding through the forest on the mountainside, and asked Mr. Oriole what it was. His companion replied that sometimes men traveled along ribbons of mud like that at the bot-

tom of the trench. Poor men, who could not fly!

Mr. Oriole's reply made the gap between the trees more interesting to Kenneth. Of course! He should have known what it was: a forest trail such as his father sometimes traveled, and had written about in his letters. Suppose his father should be coming along this one now? What fun it would be to meet him here, so far from home!

All morning, Kenneth and Mr. Oriole hunted among the trees along the trail. Food was as plentiful and good here as anywhere else in the forest, and Kenneth could keep an eye on the pathway below. His father's last letter had told of plans for making a long journey by mule-back through the forests of northern Guatemala. <sup>Kenneth</sup> ~~He~~ suspected that he and his companion were already in Guatemala, as they had flown so long over Mexico, and this might well be the trail his father would follow.

Hours passed without the appearance of a single traveler along this lonely trail. Then at last, toward the middle of the morning, he spied three small figures creeping up the mountainside. He dropped lower among the boughs to see them better. From their dark skins, he supposed they were Indians. He became greatly excited, for he had never seen Indians before, except in motion pictures. He flitted closer and saw that they were a man, a woman, and a boy. They were short people, with dark brown skin and broad noses and coarse black hair. Each bent forward beneath a heavy burden, held on his back by a rope attached to a leather band that passed across his fore-

head. Their bare legs and feet were spattered with the brown mud.

The man carried a slender, straight rod that Kenneth thought might be a walking staff, except that it was too long, and the bearer seemed careful not to let it touch the ground. Presently the Indian noticed Kenneth, who in his excitement had come close to the trail. With a quick movement, he slipped the band from his forehead and dropped his pack to the ground. Then he took something from a small pouch that hung by his side and pushed it into the end of the stick, which was hollow from end to end. He put one end of the stick to his mouth and pointed the other at Kenneth, who all this while had been watching with great interest.

"Ch-r-rr," sharply called Mr. Oriole, who at last had discovered where his friend had gone, and had come to see that he was not getting into trouble.

Kenneth had already learned that this warning cry must be obeyed instantly and without question. He fled back into the bushes as something whizzed past him. The man had shot at him with a dart from his blowgun.

It had been an exceedingly narrow escape from death, but birds have so many narrow escapes that they take them lightly. Kenneth and Mr. Oriole flew up to the treetops and continued to search for food and to rest as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened. They did not even talk about Kenneth's close scrape. But Mr. Oriole warned him that it was always dangerous to go near men, especially while they were in the tropics.



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Hours more passed before anybody else appeared on the trail. This time it was a larger party, two men mounted on mules, followed by four Indians with loads on their backs. Kenneth flew down to view the travelers more closely, ~~then~~ ~~then~~ telling himself that he would be very careful to remain hidden by the foliage.

Who was that tall man riding the leading mule? Could that be Kenneth's father, with his face covered by a thick brown beard such as he had never seen on his father at home? And would his father, who always dressed so neatly, wear such dirty clothes, all spattered with the soft mud kicked up from the trail by the hoofs of the mules? He flitted closer to the trail side to peer through the foliage into the man's face. He had his father's nose, and the same kindly eyes, and wore the old, battered, gray felt hat that Mother had told him to be sure not to bring home again. Yes, it was Kenneth's father!

In the joy of finding his father, Kenneth forgot that he was going to be cautious. He flew right out to the edge of the trail, shouting "Father! Father!" But Mr. Colton heard only two clear oriole whistles. He reined up his mule to look at the bird.

"By Jove! What a beautiful oriole! Just as pretty as the one that nests in the old elm tree at home! Fall must be coming on, for the birds are arriving from the north," Mr. Colton said to himself. At that moment he felt a trifle homesick, thinking of his home and family so far away.

Then he called out something in a language Kenneth could

not understand, and one of his men ran up with the camera he used for his fastest snapshots. It was an opportunity for a picture too good to lose. Kenneth knew what was coming, and flitted into a good pose in a flowering shrub close beside the trail. He pretended to be terribly frightened, and dashed away when he heard the click of the camera shutter— but by that time the picture had been taken.

One of the Indians <sup>had</sup> removed a slingshot from his pocket, fitted a pebble in it, and was drawing back the rubber band to shoot at the oriole, when Mr. Colton saw out of the corner of his left eye what was happening. He snapped out a few words in that language Kenneth could not understand. But Kenneth knew the voice very well: it was the same voice his father had used years before when he found his small son playing with his most expensive camera, which everybody in the house had been solemnly warned never to touch. He had heard his father speak that way only once before, but he had not forgotten that tone. The Indian made his slingshot vanish in a trice.

Kenneth was beginning to understand why Mr. Oriole had told him to be very careful of the Indians, for they seemed to neglect no opportunity to kill birds, no matter how small, which they ate. Since he could say nothing that his father would understand, he flew up into the trees to tell Mr. Oriole excitedly about the meeting. Then both of the birds flew up to the top of the mountain, to watch the party pass the summit. When he was far up the mountainside, Kenneth

looked back to see how his father was coming. The travelers seemed not to have moved at all. They were winding up the mountain at a snail's pace, with the poor mules sinking at each step almost up to their bellies in the soft mud of the trail, and drawing out each hoof with a loud, smacking squash. Kenneth had thought it must be great fun to ride muleback over forest trails, but now he was happy that he could travel on his own wings instead of riding.

After a long while, Mr. Colton's party reached the top of the mountain, where Kenneth and Mr. Oriole were waiting in the treetops. Kenneth's father called a halt. He and his companion dismounted from their mules, while the Indians rested their heavy packs on the bank beside the trail. One went to cut bamboo shoots for the mules to eat. Another kindled a campfire to heat the food that was taken from one of their packs. Soon all were resting and eating.

Kenneth was happy as he watched his father from high in a tree. He was thinking how he would tell his father about their meeting, after both came home again. He would say: "Father, let me see that picture you took of me in Central America." His father would look surprised and ask: "How could I take a photograph of you in Central America, Son, when you have never been within a thousand miles of it?" Then Kenneth would reply: "Oh, yes, you did take my picture in the tropics, Father. You made a snapshot of an oriole one day while you were riding on mule back up a very muddy trail through the



high forest. Remember? That circle was it? Then he would tell

his father all about his adventures. What can it be?

Then Kenneth remembered Lucille, to whom he had not given

a thought all that eventful morning. If he returned home with

out his sister, his father would ask: "What have you done with

my only little girl, whom you promised to take care of while

I was away? I thought that I could trust you, but I see now

that I was mistaken."

No, unless they found Lucille, Kenneth could never return

home and become a boy again, for he would not dare to leave

his father. He must wear his circle's leather for the

rest of his life. He had made up his mind to that.

Chapter 9  
IN THE TALL GRASS

That night Mr. Oriole and Kenneth roosted in a tree with dense, dark foliage, beside a river at the edge of the forest, on the southern side of the mountain where Kenneth had met his father. Next morning, at the first peep of dawn, an ear-splitting roaring shattered his last light sleep. He was so startled by the deep, deafening roar, which seemed to come from close beside him, that he darted from his perch and rushed out into the clear space above the river, although the light was still so dim that he could hardly see. He fluttered around, fearful and bewildered, then alighted on a dead tree lying on the river bank.

"What's happened to you, Kenneth?" Mr. Oriole called down to him, as soon as the roaring stopped and he could make himself heard.

"Those terrible roars! They frightened me. What made them?" Kenneth called back.

"Come here and I'll tell you. It's nothing to be afraid of."

Since Mr. Oriole had not budged from his perch, Kenneth knew there was no real danger, and flew up beside him.

"That was only the black monkeys you heard," explained Mr. Oriole. "They are the noisiest animals in these forests."

They shout so every morning when they awake, and whenever rain begins to fall on them, and whenever they are annoyed or frightened. But they eat only leaves and flowers and fruits, and they harm nobody."

Kenneth had not known that he was sleeping so close to a band of the black howling monkeys. Now that he knew they were so near, he was eager to meet them. But he had to wait until the light grew strong enough to see them well.

As soon as it was broad daylight, he flew to the neighboring tree to look at the monkeys. They were bigger than the white-faced monkeys with red caps and jackets that he had seen performing in a circus, and were covered with long, shaggy black hair with a tinge of yellow along the sides. They had black faces with flat noses and big mouths. Some wore heavy black beards on their chins, and had big, bulging Adam's apples on their throats. These bearded monkeys, he thought, must be the old men of the family. The women and children without <sup>long</sup> beards were not so homely.

The monkeys clung to the tree with their hands, feet, and long tails, which they twisted around the boughs. They pulled in slender twigs with a hand, to munch the tender leaves. They were wasteful, allowing much food to fall to the ground; but since they had ~~a~~ whole trees full of it, they would not pay for their extravagance by being hungry later. At intervals they stopped eating to scratch themselves; they appeared to suffer from many itches and spent a good part of their lives scratching. Some had such big, ugly



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sores, like huge boils, on their necks and breasts, that Kenneth felt sorry for them. In each sore lived a grub that would turn into a fly. These monkeys did not appear to lead such pleasant lives as he and other birds did.

After a while the troop of monkeys began to move to the crown of a neighboring tree. Even while they climbed over the branches, they kept their tails slung across them, to serve as an additional hold in ~~case~~<sup>an</sup> of emergency. Some of the mothers had little suckling babies clinging to their breasts. Others had bigger, half-grown children riding on their backs. Kenneth was sorry his sister was not with him now, she would so enjoy the monkey babies. When one of the mothers came to the end of a branch, she made her well-grown child dismount from her back, Clinging with feet and tail to this branch, she reached forward and grasped the tip of a bough of a neighboring tree with her hands. Her body then formed a bridge, over which the young monkey crossed safely to the next tree, then waited for its mother farther up the branch, where it was thicker. When she arrived there, the youngster climbed upon her back and rode on as before. Kenneth was delighted with this clever way of crossing from tree to tree.

He became so absorbed watching the monkeys that he forgot his breakfast. Mr. Oriole reminded him that they must eat, for they had a journey to make that day. Now that they had reached the land in which they would pass the winter, they no longer needed to make long journeys by night but could travel slowly by day, flying easily from tree to tree and hunting

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food as they went. Kenneth set forth this morning with great excitement, for Mr. Oriole had promised that in the afternoon they would reach the plantation where he expected to find his mate and Lucille, if they had come safely through that terrible storm over the Gulf of Mexico.

Without adventure, they crossed another high mountain, then a valley with a river winding through it, then still another range of mountains higher than the last. In the afternoon they dropped down into a broad valley through which flowed a much wider river. Beside this river were great plantations of bananas, extending far to the right and left. Houses and huts stood scattered among the plantations, and beside the river ran a railroad. Kenneth was surprised to reach a region where people lived and built railroads and made plantations, after passing over so much wild, sparsely populated country.

Now, at last, Mr. Oriole could quench his thirst for the nectar of the banana flowers. They flew into a plantation, beneath the huge, arching leaves of the banana plants, and soon found one with flowers. These flowers came out of a great, dull red bud that hung at the end of a long, <sup>knobby</sup>~~rough~~ stem, below a cluster of green fruits. The flowers opened downward, so that the birds had to hang upside down beside the cluster to reach the nectar. Mr. Oriole showed Kenneth how to push his bill between the cool, white petals and sip the sweet liquid - delicious drink!

They had not been long in the plantation before it was time to go to roost. Mr. Oriole led the way to a long strip

of tall, coarse grass close beside a stream, where they would pass the night. They found the grass already crowded with small birds of various kinds. More were constantly pouring in from all sides, singly or by twos and threes. The grass was aquiver with small voices and excitement. From time to time the tiny black-and-white seed-eaters, who made up the bulk of the crowd, would begin a snatch of breezy song, which passed like a gust of wind from one end of the roost to the other, to be followed abruptly by silence.

The new arrivals found other Baltimore Orioles already resting on the tall grass stems, and also orioles of other kinds brightly clad in gold and black. They looked around for Mrs. Oriole and Lucille, but the density of the grass made it impossible to see who was perching two yards away. So presently Mr. Oriole called out: "Is Mrs. Oriole here in the roost?"

"Is Mrs. Oriole here in the roost?" the little seed-eaters took up the question and carried it like a sudden breeze from one end of the tall grass to the other.

"Which Mrs. Oriole?" came back in the same small, bright voices. It appeared that more than one Mrs. Oriole was present.

"Mrs. Baltimore Oriole, who was traveling with a girl-oriole named Lucille," said Mr. Oriole.

"Mrs. Baltimore Oriole and Lucille," was the message carried by the seed-eaters from end to end of the tall grass.

"Here they are!" the glad message came singing back.

"Where?"



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"Here, at the upper end, beside the tall canes," was relayed back to Mr. Oriole and Kenneth.

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They needed no second notice, but flew at once to the upper end of the roost and found their long-lost companions, Mrs. Oriole, Lucille, and two of the youngsters. The third young oriole had become separated from the others over the sea. They all hoped that he had not been drowned and would be found later.

"I'm so glad we've found you," said Kenneth to his sister. "We were afraid you had fallen into the sea and drowned."

"How strange!" replied Lucille. "We were sure the same thing had happened to you and Mr. Oriole. We have already been here two days. Mrs. Oriole said that if you had escaped the storm you would surely turn up here."

"We came slowly. We saw many things on the way," said Kenneth.

"We came slowly, too, and saw many, many things. What did you see?" asked Lucille.

"Yesterday I saw Father."

"Oh, you're lucky! I wish I could have seen him, too. What was he doing?"

Lucille listened eagerly while Kenneth told about his meeting with their father. But she had her own tales to tell, too. She was jealous of her brother, and would not admit that all the interesting experiences were his.

"Two days ago, I saw monkeys...", she began.

"That's nothing," Kenneth interrupted her. "I've already

seen so many that I'm tired looking at them, 'They're so ugly!'

"No, I think they're really quite pretty," insisted Lucille, just for the sake of being different. "And one morning I saw a jaguar. It was lying in the sun at the edge of a cliff in the forest, licking its paws and purring just like a great cat."

"It was probably only an ocelot," said Kenneth, trying to belittle her adventure, since he could not claim one of his own to match it.

"No, it was just like the jaguar in our picture book, very big and yellow, and covered all over with black marks."

"I'll bet you were scared," said Kenneth.

"No, why should I be frightened, when I could so easily fly over the cliff where the jaguar couldn't follow me? But you would have been frightened half to death."

Already they were quarreling mildly, as though they had never been separated. So soon had they forgotten that for days each had been sick with the thought of what might have befallen the other.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Oriole had told her mate how they had struggled on through the storm, until by dawn Lucille and the two youngsters who remained with her felt that they could not fly another mile. By rare good fortune, by the first light they sighted an uprooted tree floating in the waves, and they rested upon it until they felt strong enough to continue to the land. But they had met at sea no kind-hearted girl to give them food and water, and they reached shore more dead

than alive with hunger and thirst. As soon as they felt rested and fed, she had brought them by the shortest way to the plantation, for she was already weary of travel and adventure.

About the time that Kenneth found his sister, a large flock of Eastern Kingbirds flew down to roost in the high grass. Like the orioles, they were travelers from distant northern lands. Although not as brightly clad as the orioles, they were handsome in their dark gray suits and clean white shirt fronts. Each had a bright scarlet patch in the center of his crown, which he showed only when excited or angry, and at other times kept carefully covered. They were restless birds, and even after they had settled down for the night, they could not resist darting up into the air above the grass to catch and eat any small insect that flew within view. By their constant movement they kept the whole roost stirred up, and disturbed the evening repose of the other birds.

One of the kingbirds settled for a while on a grass stalk close to the orioles. She and Mrs. Oriole looked hard at each other, and presently each recognized the other. They had been neighbors, for the kingbird had nested in an apple tree in the Colton's yard, not far from the orioles' elm.

"You've just arrived from the north, I see," said Mrs. Oriole, trying to make conversation.

"No, we came three days ago, and expect to stay a week or two more before we continue south. My mate is very fond of



this valley, so we always break our journey here for a good long rest. We've such a strenuous voyage to make, you know." Mrs. Kingbird was proud of her travels.

"And your children, how are they?" asked Mrs. Oriole.

"All doing fine, thank you, except the youngest. He had an unpleasant tiff with a yellow-breasted flycatcher and lost two wing feathers. But they'll grow in again. And what a fine family you have this year — these are all yours, I suppose."

"Only these two," replied Mrs. Oriole, pointing her bill at her own two youngsters. We had four; but one was killed when some stupid men cut down our nest, and another became separated from us in that fearful storm over the sea. I hope nothing serious has befallen him."

"But these other two who seem to be in your party?" persisted Mrs. Kingbird, who was very curious.

"They are the children who live in the white house between your nest and mine. They saved our nestlings after those men cut them down, and out of gratitude my husband changed them into orioles and brought them south to escape those horrible winters they have there."

"Did you hear that, Kingly?" Mrs. Kingbird called to her husband, who had alighted near by. "This same boy and girl saved our own nestlings from a cat when they jumped from the nest too soon last year, and you did not even remember to thank them. It was most careless of you." She also had forgotten to thank Kenneth and Lucille, but it is so convenient

to have somebody else to blame.

"It slipped my mind in the bustle and confusion of departure," explained Mr. Kingbird. "But I'll tell you what: we'll make them kingbirds and take them to South America with us. We're hardly halfway yet; we travel slowly and by day, and it should be a most interesting trip for them. So many mountains and rivers and forests to see! They haven't seen anything yet; one has not really traveled unless he's been to South America and seen the snow-capped peaks of the Andes."

Like many self-assertive people, Mr. Kingbird rarely had an original idea. But he could always suggest improvements on the ideas he got from others. He never would have thought, like Mr. Oriole, ~~like Mr. Oriole~~, of taking Lucille and Kenneth on a journey as a reward for saving his children. But now that it had been suggested to him, he was offering to take them twice as far and to show them greater wonders.

"Oh, Kennie, do let us go to South America with the kingbirds! It will be so pleasant to travel all the way by daylight," said Lucille.

She had noticed that all the kingbirds were dressed alike, with no difference between fathers and mothers, grown-ups and youngsters. If they became kingbirds, Kenneth would no longer be more beautiful than she was. That was one of the reasons why she wished to go to South America with the kingbirds, but she would have been ashamed to admit it.

"Sssh! Don't talk so loudly," warned Kenneth in a whisper. "You'll hurt the orioles' feelings. It would be most ungrateful to leave them now after they have brought us so far and saved us from so many dangers."

Kenneth was still a boy at heart, loyal to his friends. Lucille was inclined to think more of her own pleasure. But plead as she would, she could not persuade Kenneth to leave the orioles and go to South America with the kingbirds.

The dusk was now growing deeper; and soon all the birds became drowsy, and tucked back their heads among their feathers and fell asleep. Some dreamed of sunny meadows overgrown by tall grasses nodding beneath the weight of seeds, with never a snake or a hawk. Others dreamed of cradles swinging high in elm trees, from which their nestlings never fell and came to grief; and still others of apple trees without a cat prowling beneath them. But those who had stuffed themselves too full in the evening, or had gobbled up insects that did not agree with them, suffered hideous nightmares, and lived again through midnight storms at sea, or hair-breadth escapes from the talons of a hawk. And Lucille dreamed that she wore plumage so bright and dazzling that even Mr. Oriole and Kenneth looked dull and dingy beside her.



## Chapter 10

## THE CASTLE-BUILDERS

Next morning, after they awoke at daybreak, the birds lingered in the tall grass, enjoying a pleasant sense of drowsy contentment and quiet companionship. The seed-eaters repeated their lively songs; the orioles and a few other birds whistled a few notes; but it was late in the year for much singing at dawn.

Kenneth thought how good was this free, easy, outdoor life, with no clothes to put on and take off, to wash and iron and mend; no bed to make up in the morning; food in abundance, costing only the effort to find it; no things to be bought, taken care of, and make one's life a burden.

It was good, too, to be friendly with so many other creatures. While he was a boy, so many things had been afraid of him: birds and squirrels and rabbits and all the woodland animals, sometimes even smaller boys. Now almost nothing feared him, for he harmed no living thing except the insects he ate to satisfy his hunger; and since they did not appear to feel pain or fear, it was difficult to be sorry for them. Often little seed-eaters not a third his own size, or the tiniest of the flycatchers, or hummingbirds still smaller, would perch near him and show no fear.

Here in the tall grass were hundreds of birds, big and little, of a dozen different kinds, all agreeing well enough together, yet each going and coming and doing as he pleased,

without being forced to do what he did not want to do by others bigger and stronger than himself.

Yet even though nothing was afraid of him now, he was hardly afraid of more things than when he was a boy. Then he had to be so careful of automobiles when he went walking or rode his bicycle. If he passed through a pasture, it was always a question whether the bull could be trusted not to charge. Strange dogs were a constant menace; once he had been bitten severely. At school, bigger boys sometimes bullied him. Now that he was a bird, he had to be careful of hawks; but he was learning which kinds were dangerous and which could be trusted because they ate only snakes and lizards, or insects, or snails. The dangerous kinds were not abundant; and when he dashed among the close-set branches of a tree, they could not catch him. At night he slept well covered by the foliage, where the keen eyes of owls could not pick him out, and on slender, yielding twigs or grass stems, which would move when touched by a prowling weasel or snake, and warn him in time to dart away through the sheltering darkness. It seemed that the chief things a grown oriole needed to fear were people and the things they made, whether innocently or to kill birds, and the perils of travel by night and over the sea.

Kenneth could not have put into words all the things he felt as he rested that morning with the other birds in the tall grass. But years later, when he grew up to be a man and

could express himself well, he remembered them, and told his friends about them; and the memory made him glad.

As the light grew stronger, the birds of various kinds sallied forth from the tall grass, singly, or two or three together, or in little flocks; and each went in search of the kind of breakfast that it liked best. The kingbirds flew up to the treetops, from which they made long, graceful darts into the air to capture flying insects. The seed-eaters scattered over the grassy places where they found an abundance of their favorite food. Kenneth and Lucille followed Mr. Oriole and his family into the trees along the river banks, to search for caterpillars, spiders, and berries.

When their hunger was satisfied, they perched in a willow tree beside a brook to rest. They liked the willow tree; it reminded them of the willows beside a brook that flowed near their home. Of all the hundreds of kinds of trees in that valley, it was the only wild kind whose name they knew. Its small, light-colored, delicate leaves made it look very different from the surrounding trees with dark, heavy foliage.

"Bet you; bet you; bet, bet, bet you," called a pleasant voice from the thicket beneath the willow tree. Over and over the call was repeated.

"Hello! Let's see who wants to bet me!" said Kenneth, and dropped down into the tangle of low bushes and vines on the bank of the stream. Lucille followed. Presently they saw a small bird no bigger than a wren, carrying a green leaf in its sharp bill. Its plumage was <sup>grayish brown</sup> ~~dark gray~~, with a bright rud-



dy breast and a patch of the same color on each wing. It flew to a pile of fine twigs many times larger than itself, held up by some low branches overgrown with cordlike creepers. One end of the pile of sticks was high and round, like a little tower, the other broad and flat, like a ~~large~~ platform. After hopping over the mass of twigs for a few moments, the bird dived headfirst into a narrow, round opening on top of the flat part of the pile, and so disappeared. Kenneth and his sister watched in silence; and soon a gray head with red eyes and a sharp black bill was thrust up through the doorway, and another bird like the first came out and hopped over the platform, calling cheerfully "Bet you; bet you; bet, bet, bet you."

"What a pretty playhouse they have!" exclaimed Lucille to her brother. "Why don't other birds make playhouses like that?"

The ruddy-breasted bird overheard her remark and was offended. She drew herself up and said with dignity: "not a playhouse but our nest. I was warming the eggs inside until my husband came to take my place. It's clear that you do not belong here, or you would not make such a mistake."

"I'm so sorry; I didn't mean to be rude," apologized Lucille.

"You see, we've just arrived from far away, and we didn't know. Where we live, birds don't make such fine, big nests," explained Kenneth, eager to be on good terms with the owner of such an interesting structure.

"And who may you be?" the little bird asked affably. It was easy to see that she was pleased by Kenneth's last remark.

"I'm Kenneth Colton, and this is my sister, Lucille. We're really human children, but we're dressed like orioles because we've come with them from the United States, And who are you?"

Kenneth had expected the sharp-billed bird to be surprised by his statement that they were really human children; but she took it as though it were an everyday occurrence for children to be transformed into birds. "Some call us spine-tails, but others who know better call us castle-builders. There are no other birds in these parts that build such strong castles for their families."

"But do you build it all alone?" asked Lucille, who had noticed that some of the sticks in the castle were two or three times as long as the castle-builder, and nearly as thick as a lead pencil. She wondered how such a small bird could carry such big sticks.

"I and my partner, who is now inside warming the eggs. We work hard for two weeks or a month, and then it's done," explained the castle-builder.

While she spoke, the castle-builder was busy hopping over the nest, pulling up a falling stick here and pushing a loose one into place there. Such a big, elaborate nest needed constant attention to keep it in order. Then, with a hasty "Pardon me a minute," she flew off into the thicket, and soon returned carrying a broad, flat piece of bark, that she laid on top of the towerlike part of the nest. Then the visitors

noticed that the material here was different from that in other parts. It was mostly of coarse, flat pieces, like bark and strips of leaf and broad leaf stalks, and it formed a thatch to shed rain from the nursery, which was situated in the lower half of the tower.

While Lucille and Kenneth watched, the castle-builder flew away once more. This time she was gone somewhat longer, and when she appeared again she bore a limp piece of cast snake-skin in her bill. She carried this in through the doorway, and in a moment she came out with a shred of lizard skin, which she tucked into a crevice between the sticks in the side of the tower. Her housekeeping seemed to be complicated.

"Please, Mrs. Castle-builder, may we ~~enter~~<sup>go inside</sup> and see the nursery?" asked Lucille, who was full of curiosity about what had been done with the snakeskin.

The castle-builder stopped her constant bustling to examine the orioles with one eye. They were embarrassed by such close scrutiny.

"I'm afraid you're rather big. You might get stuck in the doorway, or break our eggs because there is not enough room for you in the nursery," she said at last.

"Oh, please, Mrs. Castle-builder! We'll be very, very careful. We've never seen the inside of such a wonderful nest," pleaded Lucille.

"Well, I must ask my husband first. Wait just a minute, please," replied the castle-builder, then dived through the doorway and vanished.

In a moment the winged children could hear the low, soft



tones of earnest conversation coming through the walls. They thought they could distinguish the words "strangers," and "come so far," and "well-bred birds"; but it was hard to understand all that was said. Presently Mrs. Castle-builder reappeared, followed by her husband, who looked so much like her that Kenneth and Lucille were not sure they could tell them apart. The child-orioles were formally introduced to Mr. Castle-builder.

"You may enter one at a time," said Mrs. Castle-builder. "But please be careful not to touch our precious eggs with those long toenails of yours."

The castle-builders' excellent manners had put Kenneth and Lucille on their good behavior; otherwise, they might have argued about who would go first. Happily, Kenneth remembered that he had been taught something about "ladies first," and so he said gallantly: "You go first, Lucille." Later he was proud of having said that.

Lucille flew first to the platform, and near its end found a little pile of twiglets finer than the rest. In the center of this was the narrow, round doorway, through which the castle-builders went in and out. She stuck her head in and squeezed through, with no room to spare. She found herself at the end of a long, narrow tunnel, which was the front hall of the castle. Enough light filtered through the wall of sticks to show her that the hallway was carpeted from end to end with shreds of the whitish cast skins of lizards and snakes, fitted together so carefully that they covered all the floor.

The castle-builders must have hunted long and diligently to find so much cast reptile skin among the thickets. Lucille wondered whether they took up all this odd carpet at their spring house cleaning, as her mother did at home.

Then she pushed forward down the hallway, moving slowly and carefully in a crouching attitude, for it was so low and narrow that she could hardly pass. In the middle she came to a place where the passage was slightly smaller, and here she stuck. For a moment she was terribly frightened; she could neither go forward nor turn around; and to push tail-first back to the doorway would ruin her plumage. In desperation, she shoved hard with her legs, pressing her wings closely against her body at the same time, and pushed through the narrow place. From here it was easier to reach the end. She breathed more freely when the narrow tunnel at last opened into a wider chamber.

The room into which Lucille now pushed her head was dimly lighted by narrow rays of daylight that found their way through chinks in the walls made of fine twigs. It was round from side to side and from top to bottom, like the inside of a slightly flattened hollow ball. The cupped bottom of the nursery was softly lined with small, downy, green leaves. Those on top were fresh, for they had been brought by the castle-builders that same morning. On the freshest of the leaves lay four small, pale blue eggs. Lucille stood for a moment admiring them, for they were beautiful upon their green bed, in the soft light of the nursery.

Then, with great care not to touch the eggs with her sharp toenails, she entered the little round chamber to turn around. Again she struggled along the narrow hallway, past the tight place, and at last pushed her head up through the doorway into the outer air.

"What a beautiful nest you have, so snug and well arranged inside!" she exclaimed to Mrs. Castle-builder, who was waiting anxiously on the platform, fearful lest her big visitors accidentally harm her eggs.

"And you can be sure that the rain never leaks through our thick roof," she replied. Then she slipped inside to see whether her eggs were all whole. In less than a minute she came out again.

"Now it's your turn," she said to Kenneth, who promptly pushed through the narrow doorway. He had an even harder time going down the hallway than Lucille did, for he was slightly bigger than she was. Once he felt that he was so firmly stuck that he would never be able to escape. But finally he emerged with his feathers very ruffled.

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Castle-builder," said the winged children together. "And we thank you, too, Mr. Castle-builder. We hope you will both come to visit us some day." They did not think it likely that small, short-winged birds like the castle-builders could fly across the Gulf of Mexico, but it seemed the proper thing to say.

Then Lucille and Kenneth flew off to fresh adventures, leaving their new friends to finish their neglected housekeeping.



Chapter 11

HOMESICK

During the morning great white clouds had been gathering overhead, beautiful against the deep blue sky. As they grew fatter and ~~fatter~~, the blue was gradually covered, as blue eyes are covered by drowsy lids slowly closing. Then the heaven was completely overcast by dark, frowning clouds, stretching unbroken from side to side of the broad valley and hiding the summits of the ~~high~~, forest-clad mountains that rimmed it.

Soon after midday, ~~the~~ rain began to fall in big, heavy drops. All afternoon it came down in torrents. Birds could not find enough food, and went hungry to roost in the tall grass beside the river, which had risen alarmingly. Its water that had been so clear ~~was~~ now brown with earth carried down from the mountains, and went roaring and gurgling by. The <sup>torrent</sup> ~~they~~ carried dead trunks and broken branches, and at times unfortunate little animals that could not escape its sudden rise. The tall grass was awash in the flood on its outer side, where all the high stems bowed downstream with a rhythmic motion.

"It's not safe to sleep here tonight," said a kingbird, then flew up to the top of a tree that grew near by, followed by many others.

"It's dangerous here with the river rising so," whispered a seed-eater; and the whisper was carried like a breath

of wind from end to end of the roost. Soon all the seed-eaters flew over the high canes and vanished.

"We can't sleep here tonight," said Mr. Oriole, and led his family away to a clump of bushes in a hillside pasture. Soon all the birds had deserted the tall grass, about whose roots the swirling water was every minute growing deeper.

The gray evening faded slowly into a coal-black night, without a moon or a single star in the frowning sky. Fireflies bravely flashing here and there seemed lost in the immensity of the blackness. All night the rain fell, slowly, steadily, relentlessly. The growling and roaring of the swollen river rose to the hillside where the orioles slept and formed the undertone of their dreams. They and other birds that roosted amid foliage were gradually soaked by the long rain. Only the woodpeckers who slept in holes that they had carved for themselves in dead trunks, and the wrens who slept in cozy covered nests that they had built in the thickets, and the bananaquits in their neat round nests in the trees, remained dry throughout that wet night.

In the dim gray dawn the orioles awoke, cold and unhappy. The rain had stopped; but the sky was everywhere overcast by heavy, leaden clouds; and no glow of sunrise showed which side was east. After a while, Mr. Oriole led Lucille and Kenneth to seek breakfast among the wet, heavy foliage, which let down a shower of drops whenever they touched it. It was not pleasant searching for insects and nectar in such weather, with wet plumage and feet.

Kenneth had awaked feeling something heavy inside, where he supposed his heart to be. As the morning grew older, the weight became heavier, until it seemed that it would drag him to the ground. Bravely he tried to follow his companions and eat as they did, but before long the thing inside became so heavy that he could no longer carry it around. He lost all appetite, and dropped a juicy berry from the tip of his bill. Then he sat in a tree with his head drawn in and his plumage fluffed out, too miserable now to move.

Kenneth was homesick, terribly homesick. He suffered from an illness just as real as chicken pox, measles, or a sore throat, and even more distressing, for it attacks the mind rather than the body. It is a sickness sometimes hard to cure.

All his life, when he had found or been given something beautiful or valuable, his first impulse had been to carry it home. Until he had taken it home, it did not seem to be really his. And when he had interesting adventures or saw memorable sights, he could sometimes hardly wait to tell his parents. They always listened so attentively, and sometimes made remarks that called his attention to points he had not seemed to notice.

And now in a few weeks he had lived through more adventures and seen more marvelous sights than in whole years of his former life as a boy. He wanted so much to take the memories of his adventures home, for only there he felt quite safe and at ease, and only there could he be sure of keeping them. He longed to tell his mother about all he had seen and done. But



he thought of the long months that must pass slowly, one by one, before he could possibly return, and the many hundreds of miles of land and sea separating him from his loved home, and all the dangers he must pass through before he could reach it. And who knew whether he would live to return home, or perish in a foreign land, or in the ocean?

When they saw that he was sick, Mr. and Mrs. Oriole were kind to him, bringing choice tidbits to place in his mouth, just as though he were a fledgling unable to find enough food for himself. His sister also pitied him, and gave him a fat caterpillar. He was grateful for all this kindness, but it made him sadder. It reminded him of his parents' loving attention when he was sick, and made him think more about them. It would have been a comfort to cry, to seek a quiet nook amid the foliage where he would not be seen, bury his head beneath a wing, and shed some of the heaviness from his heart in heavy tears. But a bird cannot weep.

After a while, Mr. Oriole had a bright idea. While Kenneth was a boy he had been fond of his breakfast cocoa, and chocolate in bars and drops, and cake with chocolate icing, and chocolate ice cream. In fact, he liked almost everything flavored with chocolate. He had told Mr. Oriole that when they reached the tropics, he wanted especially to see how chocolate grows. So now his friend suggested that they visit a small cocoa plantation that he knew.

Kenneth pulled himself together and followed Mr. Oriole and Lucille across the river, over a corner of a banana plan-

tation, then over a pale green field of sugar-cane, beside which grew the cocoa trees. They had low trunks, which branched a few feet above the ground, and were covered with smooth, dark brown bark. The pointed leaves were bigger than a man's hand and while still young were deep red. The small reddish flowers grew right on the trunk and thicker branches, and here the heavy pods hung. Since the delicate cocoa trees would be injured by strong sunshine, taller trees of other kinds had been planted to shade and protect them.

Kenneth and Lucille looked ~~longingly~~<sup>eagerly</sup> at the yellow ripe pods, which were as long as themselves and much fatter, and covered with low ridges from the short stalk to the tapering end. It had been so long since they had tasted chocolate, and they enjoyed it so! They clung beside a pod and pecked at the shell, but it was much too thick and woody for their slender bills to pierce.

Presently they heard a loud tapping and went to investigate. A woodpecker, striped black and white and with a bright red head, was clinging to one of the big yellow pods and hammering away at it with all his might, while his gray-headed mate looked on. His sharp, chisel-like bill soon pierced the woody shell, and when the opening was wide enough he ate what he found inside. After he flew away, his mate pecked food from the hole. When she left, it was the orioles' turn.

Kenneth went first to the woodpeckers' cocoa pod. Looking into the hole, he found the inside filled with soft, white pulp. He pecked out a little and enjoyed the slightly sweetish, slightly sour taste. He liked it so much that he contin-

ued to eat until Lucille demanded that he leave some for her.

Imbedded in the pulp were big, hard, flattish seeds that Kenneth supposed must be the cocoa beans. They were too big to come through the hole that the woodpecker had made, and he pecked into one that he could reach through the opening, expecting that it would taste like unsweetened chocolate, but he was disappointed. It would need to be fermented and dried and refined before it took on the delicious flavor that he remembered so well. After he had tasted the chocolate bean and found that he did not like it, he gave up his place to his sister, who ate some of the sweet pulp, then made way for Mr. Oriole.

When they had seen enough of the cocoa plantation, they flew to its edge, where they found a hut roofed with palm leaves. Its floor was the hard-packed earth, as they could plainly see through wide chinks in the walls of rough split logs. In the yard romped a little brown boy, two or three years old and quite naked. Lucille was sorry, for the moment, that she was not still a girl, so that she might wash his dirty face and dress him. But he seemed perfectly happy with his soiled mouth and dirty skin, for the day was warm.

Around the hut grew shrubs with great, bright blossoms, red and yellow and blue. There were also orange and lemon trees, and fruits of other kinds that Kenneth did not recognize. But he knew the pineapples, which grew near the ground between stiff, narrow, sharp-pointed leaves, and when ripe were deliciously fragrant. On bare ground beside the hut lay



woven mats on which cocoa beans were spread to dry.

The orioles lingered around the hut, finding things to eat among the foliage of the shrubs and fruit trees, and pecking into a juicy orange <sup>in which</sup> ~~that~~ a woodpecker <sup>made a hole</sup> had opened. Presently an older boy, brown like his little naked brother, was seen coming along the path ~~approaching~~, and Mr. Oriole said it was time to go.

They flew back to the banana plantation to sip nectar from the white flowers, disturbing the little black, stingless bees, who laboriously bit away a petal from each to uncover the sweet liquid, which their short tongues could not otherwise reach. Here they found other birds engaged in the same delightful occupation: Orchard Orioles, handsome in chestnut and black, who had come south like themselves; and big brown birds with white bellies who they thought were jays, because they were so noisy; and other big birds with rich chestnut suits and long yellow tails and sharp bills with orange tips, whom Mr. Oriole greeted politely, calling them Montezuma Oropendolas, his distant relatives.

While Lucille rested upon the midrib of a huge, broad banana leaf, a little brown lizard crawling over it started to push out his throat toward her. Out and out came the throat, until it stood out prettily in front of the lizard like a flat, yellow half moon. Lucille thought the animal was being rude, and to get even tried to stick out her tongue at him. But her oriole's tongue would not come out far; she wanted a hummingbird's or a woodpecker's long white tongue, or her old girl's tongue, just then. <sup>When</sup> the lizard stuck out his throat again, and a gray hawk swooped down and seized him in its talons, to

carry him away and eat him. Lucille had been so intent on watching the lizard that the hawk might as easily have caught her. She was sorry for the lizard, but thankful that the hawk had taken him instead of herself.

Soon the big Brown Jays began to shout and scream so loudly that all the other birds were instantly ~~on the~~ alert and looked around ~~them~~ for danger. It could hardly be a hawk this time, for these bold jays feared only the largest of them. Kenneth noticed two brown men walking beneath the tall banana plants, leading a mule with a pack saddle. The men's thin clothes were patched and mended, and everywhere marked with indelible brown stains made by the juice of the banana plants. Their trousers were tied tightly around their ankles with string to keep insects and spiders from crawling up their legs. Their feet were bare. A long, straight knife hung in a leather sheath from each man's belt. One had a long scar on his left cheek. With their big knives, they looked dangerous to Lucille, who would have been afraid to meet them alone, if she did not have wings.

The men stopped beneath a banana tree that bore a great cluster of green bananas hanging far above their reach. They looked carefully up at it for a few seconds, then shook their heads, for the bananas were still too thin. They went on until they came to another tree with a full cluster. Although still quite green, the bananas in this bunch were fatter and ready to be cut. One of the men took his long knife from its sheath and slashed into the soft stem as high as he could reach, with-

out cutting it through. With a loud swish of moving foliage, the wide-spreading crown of the banana plant toppled over with its heavy bunch of fruit. The bunch was caught by the other man before it could strike the ground, and severed from the stem by a stroke of his knife. Kenneth thought it a pity to destroy so noble a plant to harvest its fruit. But each tall stem could flower and fruit only once, and when it was cut down its place was taken by other stems that grew up around it.

When the men had cut two bunches of bananas, they loaded them on the mule, one on each side of the thickly padded pack saddle. Then they cut two more bunches, and tied them above the first two. Next they cut one to be carried on the shoulder of each. With man and mule heavily laden, they walked through the plantation until they came to narrow tracks that ran through its midst. Here bananas were being brought in from all sides and stacked in a shed beside the light rails. All were green; no wonder the birds found so few ripe bananas they could eat.

After a while they heard a loud chug, chug, chug, and in a few moments a small locomotive appeared rounding a long curve between the tall banana plants. It drew a string of open cars already partly laden with the fruit. Kenneth thought of the fun a boy might have with such a full-grown toy railroad. At the point where the waiting bananas were piled, the train stopped; and the fruit was loaded into the empty cars, well padded with dry banana leaves so that it would not be bruised.



When all the fruit had been picked up, the toy engine chugged on until it came to the next deposit of waiting bananas. At last, after it had stopped many times and filled all the cars, it arrived at the big railroad, where a full-sized locomotive, with a train of big box cars, was waiting to receive the bananas and haul them to the ship at the distant seaport. Then they would be carried northward over the water, some, perhaps, to be eaten by playmates that Kenneth and Lucille had left at home.

When they went to roost that evening in the clump of bushes on the hillside, Kenneth was much happier, and no longer felt the heavy weight within him. He had seen so many interesting things that he had almost forgotten his homesickness.

## Chapter 12

## THE GARDEN

The weather continued wet and gloomy, and the river remained so high that the birds did not return to roost in the tall grass beside it. Kenneth was homesick more than once again, and Mr. Oriole became alarmed by his condition. Lucille suffered less. Although she was more cautious than her brother, she was more flexible, and adapted herself more readily to new situations.

Finally, Mr. Oriole announced that he would take them to a part of the country where dry weather was already beginning and they would enjoy more sunshine. It would be necessary to cross high mountains, but they would travel slowly by day. Mrs. Oriole preferred to stay on the banana plantation, as the rain did not bother her much and she liked the food better. The young orioles felt that they were now old enough to go where they wished, without their parents. Mr. Oriole bade farewell to his family, planning to meet his mate next spring in the elm tree where they nested, and set out one morning with the two winged children.

They flew up the valley of the big river, which was now swollen and swift and dark brown with mud. Soon they passed beyond forests and banana plantations and entered a land such as Kenneth and Lucille had never seen before. Scattered among low, thorny trees stood tall, spiny cacti with fat, green branches pointing skyward and no leaves, and prickly

pear bushes with broad, flat, jointed branches that seemed in danger of falling apart. They flew over a town where the houses, all of one story, had white walls and red tile roofs, just as Mr. Fargo had said. After a while, they dropped down into a tree to rest and eat.

At first, Lucille and Kenneth were afraid to hop among the branches to seek food, for most of them bristled with sharp thorns. But Mr. Oriole showed them how easy it was to alight on a prickly bough without hurting themselves. They tried to follow his example and that of the other birds around them. After pricking themselves a few times, they learned how to put their toes between the thorns and avoid their points. Soon they were flitting among the spiny branches as lightly as the birds who lived here all year. While they delayed here a few days, Mr. Oriole introduced them to his cousins, who were lovely golden plumage, with black throats and wings and tails. It seemed that everywhere they went, Mr. Oriole found relatives.

Then, travelling a little each day, they flew over mountains wooded with pine and oak trees, which reminded them of the woods at home. Next, they crossed great level plains, high above the sea, where Indian men were harvesting corn. Other fields were covered with the stubble of wheat, and in the pastures boys ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ with long whips herded sheep. The travelers passed more towns with white walls and red roofs, larger than those they had seen where the cactus grew. Here and there, the plains were broken by huge chasms, so



deep that tall trees growing in them failed by far to reach their rims. Men walking or riding horseback would wind slowly down one wall of the chasm, ford the stream that flowed through it, and creep up the zigzag trail on the opposite wall. But the birds, flying straight from rim to rim and looking down on the treetops far below, would be over the chasm before the men could turn two curves in the winding path.

Then they beheld great, tapering mountains rising up ahead. From the top of one a long plume of smoke trailed away in the wind. Now Kenneth was proud that he had been attentive in his geography classes, and could tell his sister that these peaks were volcanoes, the chimneys through which escaped the fumes from fires deep within the earth. He wanted to fly straight to the top of the active volcano and look down into its fiery throat; but Mr. Oriole flatly refused to go, saying it was much too cold for them at the tops of these lofty peaks. Kenneth had no doubt that Mr. Oriole was right, for the higher they flew, the colder the air became.

That night they roosted in a cypress tree at the edge of a pasture. When they awoke at dawn, the open fields around them were white with frost. They were cold and unhappy until the sun rose and quickly warmed the thin air. But they were glad to start downward again, after finding a bit of breakfast, with the promise that they would not pass another night in this high, cold land.

Soon they flew over the shoulder of a huge mountain and saw ahead, far below, a great plain that sloped gently down

to an ocean that stretched on and on as far as they could see. Mr. Oriole said that neither he nor any other bird of the land could cross that immense sea from side to side. Kenneth felt sure that he was looking down on the Pacific Ocean.

All morning they winged downward toward the ocean, stopping here and there to eat. They went quickly, for the mountain slopes on this side of the country were very steep; and flying, like walking, is easier downhill than up. Soon after midday they reached the garden where Mr. Oriole said they would stay for a few months.

Kenneth and Lucille promptly fell in love with the garden, and said they would like to live in it for ever. It was indeed a delightful place, with smooth green lawns surrounded by beds of bright and fragrant blossoms. There were white lilies and sweet-scented tuberose, and gladioli of many shades, and cosmos, and huge<sup>4</sup> glowing dahlias, and lovely roses red, yellow, and white, and blossoms of many other kinds whose names they did not know. Behind the flower beds were massed shrubs with blossoms as varied and brilliant as the flowers in the beds, but these were almost all of kinds new to the winged children. They did not even know the fragrant gardenias, nor the bougainvillea with glowing masses of magenta color, nor the slender glossy-leaved jasmine that spread its sweet white blossoms over an arbor, nor the hibiscus with large red flowers.

In the middle of the garden was a fountain where birds could bathe. Its water fell sparkling down into a pool with white water lilies and waving water weeds with delicate, ferny

leaves, among which goldfish swam. Here and there, in shady nooks about the garden, benches invited people to sit and rest, enjoying its quiet beauty. All around it stood lordly palm trees with huge feathery leaves waving gracefully at the tops of tall, slender, gray columns. When they perched upon the swaying fronds so high above the ground, the birds could see the ocean spreading out far below, gleaming like an immense silver platter when the afternoon sun hung low above it. In the opposite direction, they looked up to high, tapering fire mountains with plumes of smoke waving at their crests.

Mr. Oriole, Kenneth and Lucille passed much time in the garden, hunting insects among the foliage or amid the clustered bright blossoms, bathing in the fountain, or resting in the deep shade of an orange tree, whose spheres of golden fruits glowed less brightly than their own plumage. Many birds of other kinds visited the garden, and all were friendly. Here neither cats nor boys with slingshots tried to kill them.

Beside the garden stood a long, low house with a broad porch across its front. One bright afternoon, when the sun was dropping toward the distant ocean and making it gleam, two Indian men carried a cot out from the house and set it gently down beside the gardenia shrubs. On the cot lay a white boy who seemed to be about Kenneth's age. He was all wrapped up in covers except his face, which was wasted and thin, and almost as pale as the pillow on which it rested. His wide eyes were bright with fever, yet deep and sad. The hand that peeped out from beneath the covers was delicate and thin.



A chair was carried out and set beside the cot, and a tall woman in a blue dress came to sit in it with her sewing. The boy lay for some time in silence, turning his head to gaze over the distant ocean, visible through a gap in the shrubbery. After a while he spoke to the woman. Kenneth happened to be perching with Mr. Oriole in a palm tree close by, looking down with interest at the people in the garden. When he heard the lad speak, he listened carefully, for the boy was talking in his own language, which he had not heard for many days. All the other people he had chanced to hear spoke a language he did not understand, which he supposed was Spanish. He flew down into the gardenias to hear the boy better.

"Mother," the lad was saying in a faint voice, "Mother, do you think I shall live to get well so that I can go to England and see where you and Father lived when you were children? I want so much to see how the snow makes all the fields white, and how the ice covers ponds and rivers so that you can walk and skate on them. And I want to see the trees shed all their leaves in autumn and become naked, and how they grow green again in the spring. And I would like to see the house in which you were born, and the building where Parliament meets, and Westminster Abbey where the poets are buried. And I hope to see hawthorn in blossom, and gather daisies and buttercups in the meadows, as you and Father did when you were children. But now I am going to die, and I shall never see any of it."

"Hush, Edward, you must not talk so!" replied the mother, looking up from her sewing. "Of course you are not going to die. You must be brave and cheerful, and do everything Dr. Orellana tells you, and by next spring you will be well and strong again, and we shall all go home for many months. It's been so many years since I've seen my sisters and old friends in England; I'm as eager to go as you are."

Kenneth, who had listened attentively to all this, thought it strange that Edward should be longing to see snow and ice and trees losing their leaves in fall and budding forth again in spring, for these were all things so familiar to him from early childhood that he had never stopped to think how marvelous they are. He thought that Edward should be content because he lived all the time with such wonderful things as palm trees and smoking volcanoes, and had oranges and bananas growing near his house. But the sick boy, who had been born and raised among these things, took them all as a matter of course, as Kenneth took snow and cherries and brightly tinted foliage in autumn.

The boy turned his head on the pillow, and saw Kenneth perching near him among the gardenias. Kenneth had become so absorbed in the conversation that he had forgotten all that Mr. Oriole and his own narrow escapes had taught him about the necessity to keep himself hidden from people.

"Look, Mother! What a beautiful bird!" exclaimed the sick boy. "I have never seen such a beautiful bird before. What is it called?"

"That's a Baltimore Oriole, who has just arrived from the north. He is named so because he wears the colors of the

Barons of Baltimore, who founded the colony of Maryland in North America. How delightful it will be if he stays in our garden until spring returns to the northern land where he was hatched, and he must fly northward again! If we are careful not to frighten him, I think he might stay."

Kenneth was proud to hear his plumage praised so highly. He was glad that Lucille was beyond hearing, for she was already too jealous of him. He thought that he and Edward might be friends, if he could become his old self again and talk to him. Anyhow, he liked the sick boy; so, feeling sure that these people would not harm him, he continued to perch quietly for a while in the gardenia shrub where the boy could admire him.



## Chapter 13

### A FRIENDSHIP

The garden where Kenneth met the sick boy was situated in the midst of a great plantation of coffee and sugar cane. Around it grew many thousands of glossy-leaved coffee bushes, shaded against the full force of the tropical sun by trees with open, spreading crowns. These shade trees bore masses of fluffy white flowers, among which the birds found nectar and insects. Their foliage, too, yielded much insect food. Among these trees the orioles passed their mornings. The fields of sugar cane offered them little nourishment, and they flew across their broad, pale green, billowy surfaces from side to side, rarely pausing.

The slender twigs of the coffee shrubs were at this season laden with bright red, glossy berries, the size of small cherries. Every morning at dawn, many Indian men, women, and children would leave their cabins and go out into the coffee groves to gather the ripe berries. They carried their lunches wrapped in white cloths, or in banana leaves, for they spent long hours at their task. Many of the women also carried babies slung in shawls across their backs. Mothers of the youngest infants worked with these burdens always upon them, stopping from time to time to suckle the little ones. Older children, still too young to pick coffee, were set down beneath a bush while their mothers gathered the berries.

Each coffee picker had a round basket fastened in front by a strap that passed around his <sup>or her</sup> waist. Children of seven or eight had smaller baskets and worked beside their parents. Each bent down the branches of the coffee bushes, and with deft hands plucked the shiny berries and dropped them into the basket.

When a basket was full, its contents were poured into a sack, which was left in a convenient spot near by. In the evening, a creaking two-wheeled cart, drawn by a pair of huge oxen yoked by their horns, passed along a road through the plantation to collect all the berries that had been gathered during the day. They were taken to a big mill, where complicated machinery, driven by electricity, separated the coffee beans from the pulpy flesh that surrounded them. Most of the berries contained two beans flattened against each other, but a few held only a single round bean.

After they had been separated from the pulp and washed in the mill, the beans, or seeds of the coffee shrub, were spread on wide concrete floors to dry in the sun. Kenneth and Lucille would sometimes perch in trees beside the drying floors and watch the Indians spread out the gray beans with broad wooden rakes, and stir them so that they would dry more quickly, then hurry to push them under sheds at the sides of the floor, when rain threatened or the sun set.

The winged children were greatly interested in the Indians who picked the coffee, the women in many-colored homespun dresses, and the children, some of whom were about their own

ages. They wished they could talk to the young Indians, to ask their names and ages, and whether they went to school, and if they enjoyed picking coffee. At first, they thought it would be fun to have a basket and gather bright red berries beside an Indian comrade; but when they saw how hard the children had to work all through a long day, they changed their minds.

One morning, while the orioles were seeking food among the shade trees of the coffee plantation, Lucille, looking down, noticed an Indian baby lying alone on a blanket beside a coffee bush, where its mother had left it while she picked berries near by. The net that held her family's lunch hung from a branch close to the blanket. Since no grown person who might have thrown stones at her was watching, Lucille approached to see the baby better. It was a bright, chubby creature still too young to walk, smiling and gurgling to itself, counting its tiny toes, while it amused itself all alone. 91 After a while, growing restless, the child started to crawl away through the grass and weeds around the blanket. Lucille watched it go. Then, suddenly, she noticed a big, brown snake coiled up amid the weeds directly ahead of the creeping child. Too young to realize its great peril, the tiny Indian continued to crawl toward the venomous serpent. Greatly excited, Lucille fluttered in front of the baby, trying to stop it or turn it aside. But the fluttering bird only amused the little one, who reached out its chubby hands



toward her, and continued to creep toward the lurking snake until it was scarcely two yards away. With a single venom-dealing stroke, the snake might have killed the infant.

Thoroughly alarmed, Lucille began to scold and churr loudly, oriole fashion. Her voice aroused the baby's mother, who promptly dropped her work to come and see what was causing the disturbance. Her keen eyes quickly detected the lurking snake, and with a low cry she rushed forward to snatch up her child and carry it to safety. Then she found a stout stick and beat the serpent to death.

Lucille was so absorbed in watching all this that she failed to notice other Indians approach. Among them was a boy of twelve or fourteen, a brother of the baby whose life she had saved. Seeing the oriole so near and low, and so little alert to danger, he could not resist the good opportunity to use his slingshot.

Removing the forked stick from his pocket where he carried it while he picked coffee, he fitted a coffee berry — the best missile he could find at the moment — in the rubber band, then drew it back for a good shot. The berry was well aimed and struck Lucille a glancing blow on her left wing. If it had been a hard stone, it might have knocked her to the ground, where she would have fallen into the boy's clutches; but the light, soft berry did her no great harm. With a low cry of pain, she flew up to the treetops to find her companions, Kenneth and Mr. Oriole. This blow, which left her wing sore

and stiff for a few days, was the only thanks she received for saving the Indian baby's life.

In the afternoons, Kenneth, Mr. Oriole and Lucille, with many other birds of their own and other kinds, would rest amid the foliage of the garden, or bathe in its sparkling fountain. In this lovely spot they felt secure and at ease, for the people who owned the garden were their friends and protected them. No boy with a slingshot was permitted to enter, and hawks rarely soared above it. Sometimes the birds would find a caterpillar or spider to eat, or pluck a berry from a shrub; but mostly in the early afternoon they were content to perch quietly and drowse.

On fine afternoons, Edward was carried out from the big house on his cot and set down near the fountain, or in the shade of a tree, to enjoy the fresh air and light shifting breezes, and drink in the beauty of the wide landscape and the bright fragrant blossoms and the brilliant birds that rested among the foliage. Usually his mother sat close beside him to sew or read to him from a book. But as day followed day, the poor boy failed to improve. How pale and thin he had become!

Edward delighted in the orioles that rested in his father's garden. For long intervals, he would lie motionless on his back and gaze silently up into the trees where they perched. If they failed to appear, because they were passing the afternoon in some other part of the plantation, he was

deeply disappointed. One afternoon, when the orioles returned to the garden after they had stayed away for two or three days, Kenneth heard Edward tell his mother how happy he was that the birds had come back, and how sad he had been when he had not seen them, fearing that they had left never to return.

After this, Kenneth decided to spend every clear afternoon in the garden. But sometimes the clouds towered up to great heights above the mountainside, lightning darted through them in long, jagged streaks, and thunder crashed loudly, to die away in long, angry ~~rumblings~~ rumblings. Finally, the rain fell in hard, drenching torrents. On such afternoons, the birds preferred the shelter of the great, spreading, dark-leaved star-apple trees to the lighter foliage of the garden.

Edward loved all the orioles, but his special favorite was Kenneth, who came closer than any of the others. As Edward became more familiar with the oriole Kenneth, he wanted a name for him. The sick boy had plenty of time for thinking, as he lay silent and inactive on his cot. He tried one name after another without finding one that satisfied him, until one fine, mild evening when he was permitted to stay in the garden later than usual. Then, after the ruddy sun had dipped into the shining sea many miles from the shore, and set all the clouds banked in the west aglow with flaming radiance, he noticed that some of them became just the color of Kenneth's plumage, and glowed awhile with this delightful



tint before at last they faded to grayness. So the sick boy, who of course never imagined that his favorite bird had once been a boy, too, and had a different name, decided to call him "Sunglow." Edward's mother agreed that this was an excellent name; and thereafter, when talking together, mother and son always referred to Kenneth as "Sunglow."

As Kenneth became more familiar with Edward and his mother, and heard them reveal their inmost thoughts in their low, earnest conversation together, he became certain that neither would try to harm or catch him. The loving mother had filled her only child with feelings of kindness and benevolence toward all creatures, and taught him to enjoy their presence without wishing to deprive them of freedom. They were so much more beautiful and interesting in their natural freedom than when confined in cages. Edward's long illness had made him more thoughtful than most boys of his age, who are often cruel because they are thoughtless rather than because they are wicked. He could enjoy the company of free animals without any desire to put them in cages or to kill and stuff them.

So, little by little, as he learned Edward's feelings toward himself, Kenneth lost all fear of the sick boy. One afternoon, the boy-oriole, feeling more than usually friendly toward the invalid, dropped down to rest on the head rail of his cot, close above the pale, wasted face. Edward was delighted, and for many minutes lay perfectly still, fearing to make the slightest movement lest he frighten his welcome

visitor away. As he gazed down into the wide, bright eyes so close beneath him, Kenneth was saddened by Edward's sickness, and wished with all his heart that he could do something to make him well. Knowing that it made his friend happy, Kenneth came every clear afternoon to perch upon his cot, sometimes even upon the pillow beside his face, or upon his outstretched arm, while the boy's mother looked on quietly and smiled.

Often, while Edward's mother read from a story book, Kenneth perched near by, on the cot or more often in a neighboring shrub, drinking in every word. At such times, Lucille would also fly up and rest close by, for she enjoyed stories as much as her brother did. Sometimes the books from which Edward's mother read were already familiar to the winged children, because they had heard them from the lips of their own mother, now so far away. Other stories were new to them, and they enjoyed these even more.

One afternoon, while the woman was reading a charming story about long ago, Edward interrupted her. "Look, Mother!" he exclaimed. "Sunglow seems to be listening. Do you think he can really understand?"

Kenneth was perching on a long, curving shoot of a bougainvillea bush close beside Edward's cot, with his head cocked to one side, listening intently to the story. He looked up when Edward spoke, feeling slightly annoyed that the story had been interrupted at the most exciting part. He longed to be able to say: "Of course, silly boy, I understand

English as well as you do." But he could only whistle brightly a few times, which delighted Edward greatly.

"I think Sunglow understands what we say, Mother. He is such an intelligent bird," Edward said.

"Perhaps he does," agreed the mother. "It is one of the things we can never be certain about."

Then she continued the story.

The following afternoon, Edward's mother read a story that to Kenneth was both beautiful and sad. It was about a swallow, who, traveling southward <sup>from Europe</sup> to the Nile, ended his journey one evening in a great city. On a hill in the midst of the city stood the statue of a prince, all crusted over with gold and precious stones; and the lone swallow roosted for the night in a sheltered nook on the statue. Of a sudden a drop of water, then another, fell upon the swallow, although the sky was clear and bright with stars. The drops had fallen from the eyes of the prince, who was weeping. When the swallow asked why he wept, the statue replied that, although he was called The Happy Prince, he was really most unhappy, because from the height where he stood he saw so many people who were poor and starving in the great city. Although he was covered with gold and studded with stones of great value, which he would gladly give to those who were miserable for lack of money to buy bread, he could do nothing because he was only a statue unable to move from the spot where he had been set.



The swallow offered to aid the prince by carrying the precious stones to people who would be helped by them. Gazing over the roofs of the city, the prince looked into a garret, bare and mean, where a poet sat trying to finish a poem. But the man was so weak from hunger and cold that he could not complete his verses. So the swallow, following the directions of the prince, plucked a diamond from the hilt of his sword, flew over the roofs with it, and dropped it on the table before which the poor starved poet sat trying to write. The poet sold the stone for money to buy food, and was able to finish a great and beautiful poem.

The following night, the swallow plucked a second jewel from the statue of the prince, and carried it to a widowed mother whose infant was dying, because she lacked money to buy what was needed to save it. Night after night, the swallow took another precious stone, or a piece of gold leaf, from the statue of the prince, and delivered it to some unhappy person who would be benefitted by it. Meanwhile, winter was coming on; nights grew colder; and by day the swallow found ever fewer insects to eat. The bird knew that by this time he should be coursing above the water of the Nile with his comrades who had gone before him. The prince urged him to fly southward before snow fell and he died of cold and hunger. But because he delighted in good deeds, the swallow would not leave as long as he could help the prince to relieve the suffering of the people of his city.

So the swallow stayed on, suffering more each day from cold and hunger, and each night carrying another gift from the prince to some needy person, until all the gold and precious stones had been removed from the statue, and nothing remained but the framework and the heart of lead. Then snow came and froze the swallow, who fell dead at the foot of what had been the statue of the prince. The lifeless body of the swallow and the prince's heart were carried away and cast upon the rubbish heap. <sup>¶</sup> About this time, God commanded one of his angels to bring him the two most precious things in the city. The angel returned with the swallow's body and the prince's heart, that he found upon the rubbish heap.

When the woman finished reading this story, Edward's eyes were bright with tears. Kenneth could not shed tears since he had become a bird, but he was deeply moved by the fairy tale. Now he knew that even a small bird without hands can perform noble and generous deeds, and he wished to be like the swallow.

Chapter 14

A HEROIC DECISION

As the weeks passed and Edward grew no better, his mother worried greatly. The doctor came more often and held longer consultations, sometimes in the house, sometimes in the garden. One afternoon, when he had finished examining Edward while Kenneth peered down with interest from a perch in a palm tree, he looked up gravely and said:

"Mrs. Shore, I think what is necessary is a change of climate. This fever was contracted during the boy's visit to the coast last August; it should go away in a cool, dry climate. I recommend that you take him to the highlands as soon as you can."

"Certainly, Dr. Orellana, I shall follow your advice. My one wish is to see my dear boy well and strong again. As soon as I can make arrangements, I shall take him up into the high country."

"No, Mother, I could not go away and leave Sunglow," objected Edward, when he heard what they were saying about him.

"But you must consider your health first," said the mother. "You must do as the doctor tells us so that you will recover and be your old healthy self again. Then you can come home and be with Sunglow as much as you like."

But the boy insisted that without his beloved bird he would not get well, but instead grow worse and maybe die.



Sunglow might leave before he got well and could return home. For a long while they talked it over, and finally decided that they would go to the high country and try it for a week. Then, if Edward showed no sign of improvement, they would return to the plantation. But the thought of leaving Sunglow made the boy seem weaker and more sorrowful than Kenneth had ever seen him.

Kenneth had listened with great interest to all the talk between Dr. Orellana and Mrs. Shore and Edward; at least, to as much of it as he could understand, for it was partly in Spanish, of which he did not know two words. He thought hard for a while, then flew off to seek Mr. Oriole and Lucille among the shade trees of the coffee plantation.

"Don't you think we have been here long enough?" he said to his companions. "It would be nice to fly up into the high country for a change of climate. There must be many interesting things we did not ~~have time to~~ see when we flew so swiftly across it on our way here."

"You would not like to stay in the highlands," said Mr. Oriole. "Remember the frosty night when we roosted there. It is colder now, and we would be miserable. Besides, it is too dangerous for us in that part of the country, where so many boys carry slingshots to kill birds. Since we orioles are so bright and easily seen, we run even greater risks than most other birds. No, I do not wish to go to the highlands. We should stay here where we have plenty to eat, the nights

are comfortable, and fewer boys have slingshots.

Kenneth had not forgotten how cold and uncomfortable he had felt when he awoke in the morning on their journey over the highlands. And both he and his sister had already had narrow escapes from people who tried to kill them. But he remembered the story of the swallow and the prince, and how he had resolved to do something noble like the swallow, even at the risk of his life. He decided to go with Edward, even if he must leave Mr. Oriole and his sister, and be cold every night, and be exposed to the slingshots of cruel boys, and have less food than he enjoyed on the plantation.

When he learned that Edward would be taken to the highlands on the day after tomorrow, Kenneth declared his plan to go alone. He did not tell Mr. Oriole<sup>and Lucille</sup> his real reason for going, because he feared they would call him silly, to undergo hardships and risk death for a stranger to whom he could not even speak. Only a boy can appreciate the strength of a boy's friendship. Kenneth's companions thought that he was going simply because he desired a change of scene. Mr. Oriole regretted that he had not insisted upon Kenneth's eating more serviceberry caterpillars, so that he would be more like true orioles, content to settle down for the winter in one spot where the climate was agreeable and food abundant.

Nevertheless, Mr. Oriole felt responsible for the safety of the two children he had changed into birds and brought so far from their home. He would feel that he had failed in his

duty if he had to go north next spring without both of them. It would not be fair to the people who lived in the house beside the elm tree to lose their children, when these same children had saved his own nestlings. Accordingly, when he knew that Kenneth was firmly determined to go to the highlands, even if he must go alone, Mr. Oriole resolved to accompany him, and shield him as far as possible from the perils he would encounter there, and bring him back as soon as he had enough of it, which he thought would be very soon.

On the second morning after Kenneth had declared his intention to go, he refused to fly off into the plantation to seek breakfast, as the orioles always did, but insisted upon hunting among the trees in the garden, where he could watch the roadway in front of the big house. After a while, Mr. Oriole announced that he was ready to start for the high country. Kenneth wished to wait a little longer. Mr. Oriole was growing impatient with his companion, who had insisted so stubbornly that they visit the highlands, then at the last minute could not make up his mind to go.

Presently an automobile was heard approaching along the road that wound through the coffee plantation. Followed by a spreading cloud of dust, it shot around a curve with a creaking of strained springs and tires, and with a grinding of brakes stopped in front of the house. Servants hurried out with suitcases and stowed them in and about the car. Then



Edward, dressed in traveling clothes but wrapped in a blanket and very pale, was carried out in his father's arms and gently set down on the rear seat of the automobile, where he was propped up among pillows. Mrs. Shore sat beside him, and an Indian maid entered in front beside the driver. Mr. Shore kissed his wife and son; doors were shut with bangs; and the car started down the road.

"Come! Come!" Kenneth called excitedly to Mr. Oriole and Lucille. "Now we must start. The automobile is on its way. There's no time to lose."

Then Kenneth flew after the speeding car, with his two companions, who had not known what was coming and had been taken by surprise, doing their best to catch up with him. The automobile went so fast along a straight stretch of road that the orioles fell behind; but when it wound up a hillside, the birds, flying a straight course between curves, easily overtook it. Kenneth dipped down beside the car to show Edward that he was coming along. The sick boy, who had been sitting slumped down in his seat, gloomy and disconsolate, brightened up and smiled when he saw Sunglow. All through that long ride, Kenneth from time to time flew beside or in front of the car to assure Edward that he was going all the way. When he had no doubt that Sunglow was going to the highlands with him, the poor boy began to enjoy the journey.

For hours the automobile ground in low gear up mile-long slopes that rose to the highlands. The road zigzagged upward to reduce the grade; and by flying straight up the

slopes, the three orioles not only kept up with the car without great exertion, but even found time to snatch a few billfuls of food here and there.

After a while, the car crossed a rim of mountains and dropped down to a wide plain through which a river wound. Now it raced over the level highway so fast that the birds dared not stop to eat, for fear of losing sight of it. The dust that it stirred up from the unpaved road floated in great gray clouds over the surrounding fields, brown with the stubble of corn and wheat that had already been harvested. Then they crossed a high mountain whose summit was crowned with tall pines and fir trees. As they wound down into the broad valley on its farther side, they beheld, standing in its midst, a small town with low, white-walled houses and roofs of red tiles.

Early in the afternoon, the automobile stopped before a house on the outskirts of the town. The driver honked; Mrs. Shore got out; a man came out of the house to lift up Edward in his arms and carry him inside, while servants took the suitcases. Mr. Oriole, Kenneth and Lucille flew into a cypress tree standing beside the house, to rest a while amid the dark foliage before seeking food, for they were tired as well as hungry after their long journey.

Edward was happy, because as he was being carried into the house he saw that all three of the orioles were still with him. Kenneth was happy because he had seen the look of happiness on his friend's face, and knew that he would get

well soon if his heart was glad. Lucille was glad that she had come, too, for she liked Edward. Mr. Oriole was in a bad humor after this hard, hurried journey to a place he hated, but he knew that he was doing his duty looking after his companions, and so he was not wholly miserable.



## Chapter 15

## MISFORTUNE

The walls of the house where Edward had come to dwell with his mother were low and thick and white. On the roof of moss-encrusted red tiles a pair of spotted Rock Wrens chirruped loudly and cheerfully as they hopped around seeking the insects and spiders that lurked in the crevices.

Behind the house was a garden, enclosed by a high adobe wall plastered white. Although not as large and beautiful as the garden on the coffee plantation, it was bright with white calla lilies, and great dahlias of many hues, and red montbretias, and fuchsias with dangling blossoms like fairy bells colored red and green. And it was fragrant with roses, and violets that bordered trim pathways, and the climbing mock orange that spread its sweet-scented white blossoms over the wall, and by night with the heavy odor that issued from the depths of the huge white trumpet flowers of the floripondia shrubs that grew along the eastern side.

Soon the people in the house settled into a routine much like that they had followed on the coffee plantation. In the morning, while the air was chilly, Edward remained indoors. But in the afternoon, when the bright sun shone with mild radiance through the thin, clear air, he would be carried out and set down beside the fountain in the center of the garden. Here his mother sat beside him, talking quietly

while she knitted, or reading from a book. Then the orioles, who all morning had been out foraging over the surrounding countryside, would return and rest in the garden, feeling safer within its high walls than in the outside world with its many dangers. When Mrs. Shore read, Kenneth and Lucille perched near by to listen; and often Kenneth rested on Edward's pillow, close beside his head.

As Dr. Orellana had predicted, the invigorating air of this high country little by little restored the boy's shattered health. From his bed he graduated to a reclining chair. Soon he could sit upright, and in a few weeks more he could even walk short distances. Steadily the bloom of boyhood returned to cheeks that had been so long pallid and shrunken. A merry twinkle stole back into his wide, bright eyes. He was happy with returning health, and his mother's love, and his Sunglow's unfailing friendship.

For the orioles, life was not as easy and pleasant here as it had been in lower and warmer regions. They slept through cold nights amid the dense, sombre foliage of the cypress tree that stood in a corner of the garden. When they awoke at dawn, shivering and unhappy, they looked from their high perch over the garden wall upon fields white with hoarfrost. They had to fly far in search of breakfast, because the flower garden did not supply nearly enough food for them, and the surrounding country was largely covered by bare stubble fields where they found nothing. Only the bushy hedgerows between the fields

yielded a few berries and insects, and a mile away a wood of oak, alder and pine trees offered a richer variety of foods.

Boys with slingshots were a constant menace to the birds, who had to be ever watchful to preserve their lives. Hardly a day passed without their seeing ~~some~~<sup>an</sup> unfortunate bird fall a victim to the pebble shot from the elastic catapult of some urchin. More than once, Mr. Oriole's unfailing alertness saved his companions from the same unhappy fate.

They longed to return to the abundant food, milder air, and greater safety of lower regions; and Mr. Oriole or Lucille ~~more than often~~ proposed that they do so on the morrow. But Kenneth was glad to see health slowly returning to his friend, and would not desert him, at the risk of undoing the good work already accomplished by making him unhappy by the loss of his Sunglow. He told his companions that they might go if they pleased, but he would stay alone until Edward had quite recovered his health and strength. However, Mr. Oriole and Lucille would no more desert Kenneth than he would abandon Edward, with the result that all three stayed.

Early one morning, when the three orioles were foraging in some low elderberry trees along a main road leading out from the town, Mr. Oriole uttered a sharp ch-r-r-r of alarm, for he had noticed a boy standing in the roadway with a slingshot. The young rogue had already placed a pebble in the pocket, and was drawing back the rubber band. Mr. Oriole and Lucille darted away to safety; but Kenneth, who happened



to be in the midst of eating a large caterpillar, was slow to respond to the warning. ~~A~~<sup>The</sup> pebble struck him on the breast. Gasping, he fluttered helplessly through the branches to the roadside. Before he could recover his breath, the boy's fingers closed over him. He was captive.

Seized by the greatest terror he had ever in his life known, Kenneth struggled with the strength of desperation to break away from the cruel hands that clutched him. But what is the strength of an oriole to that on an eleven-year-old boy? For less than a minute, the captive struggled to escape; then, exhausted and hopeless, he lay still as death in his captor's grasp. He was sure that his end was at hand.

As soon as the boy had the bird firmly in his clutches, he ran shouting down the road, delighted with his prize. Mr. Oriole and Lucille, now recovered from their fright, followed at a safe distance with anger and despair, to learn where their companion would be taken. A short way within the town, they saw the boy burst through a doorway in a low, white wall, calling in a language Lucille did not understand: "Mother, Mother, come quickly and see what a beautiful bird I have caught!"

Through an arched passageway, the boy entered a courtyard surrounded on all sides by the house and open to the sky. A fountain and many flowers adorned the court, and beneath the <sup>eyes</sup> of the portico that ran completely around it hung eight cages, seven of which contained birds. The empty cage was taken down by the boy's mother, who opened the door so

that he could thrust Kenneth into it. Then the door was closed and secured, and the cage returned to its place beneath the eaves.

Kenneth stood, sore and bewildered, on the floor of the cage, while all the inmates of the house, eight or ten in number, gathered around to look at him, and talked all at once. Since they spoke Spanish, he could not understand. "What a lovely bird!" they were saying. "What luck to have caught it alive!" "Now we have all the cages full." "He's the prettiest of all we have here." "What is it called?" "It's a summer chorcha." "How beautiful!" Even if the poor prisoner could have understood the praise he was receiving, it could not have made him happy in his present sad plight.

Before long the people tired of admiring their latest captive and went away, one by one, leaving a few pieces of fruit on the bottom of the cage, and some water in a narrow vessel attached to its side. For a long while, Kenneth stood motionless with drooping wings. He had no appetite for food, but after a while, consumed by a burning thirst, he swallowed a little water. From time to time, a visitor to the house was brought to admire him; but he was too miserable to be interested in anything except the questions that kept burning in his mind: "What is going to happen to me? Will I ever see my home again?"

## Chapter 16

## CAPTIVITY

Even with the coming of night, which to free birds brings kindly sleep and forgetfulness of hunger, cold and misery, Kenneth was not allowed to forget his sad predicament, for the lights and noises of the house kept him awake long after nightfall. But at last his surroundings became quiet, and the blessing of sleep came to him.

When he awoke at dawn, he felt a dull, throbbing pain in his breast, where the pebble had struck him. He was so hungry that he nibbled at the pieces of banana and papaya, now stale and soiled, that had been placed the day before on the bottom of his cage. This food did not taste good to him, now that he was accustomed to eating insects and berries plucked fresh from trees, but it helped to relieve the terrible, gnawing pangs of hunger.

After his meal, Kenneth revived enough to look around. The flowers in the courtyard were pretty, but in his present unhappy situation they failed to make him glad. Through the curtained windows that looked out upon the courtyard, beneath the roof of the portico, he had dim glimpses of the insides of the rooms. He wondered in which his hateful captor slept. If he were his old self again, instead of a miserable captive bird, he was certain he could beat that boy in a fair fight.

The morning dragged slowly on. Presently the household began to stir, and smoke floated up from the chimney at the



rear of the courtyard. After a while, the woman who appeared to be the boy's mother came and placed fresh food in the bird cages and changed the water in the little vessels. From time to time, somebody arrived to admire the latest captive, but already they were losing interest in him as the novelty wore off. Soon he would receive as little attention as the birds in the other cages.

The cage on one side of Kenneth held a Rose-breasted Grosbeak, that on the other <sup>side</sup> a slate-colored bird slightly larger than a sparrow, whose name Kenneth did not know. Now and again, one or the other of these birds would utter his melodious song. Kenneth wondered how any bird could sing in the misery of a cage.

After a while, he overcame his shyness enough to question his neighbors. "Why do you sing?" he asked the bird with the rosy breast, feeling less strange toward this one of his fellow captives, since he had known Rose-breasted Grosbeaks at home. "Why do you sing? I shall never be able to sing in this horrid cage."

"I sing lest my heart break," replied the grosbeak. "Sometimes I feel that I must die of grief, and then I sing. My song carries me far away to the north, over the mountains, over the water, over the plains, to the wet woodland beside a lake, where every May I sang among the willows and the maple trees. I sang then for the joy that was overflowing from my breast. I sang to tell of my love for my brown mate who sat warming her eggs in an elderberry bush;

and sometimes, as I covered her eggs while she sought food, I sang on the nest, for I could not contain the music that was in me. Now I sing to ease my sorrow. I must sing, or I die."

"How long have you been in the cage?" asked Kenneth.

"Three years," replied the grosbeak. "Three times has the sun swung northward since my captivity began; and each time I tried to break through these bars and follow it, back to the willows and the red maple trees and the elderberry bushes among which I was hatched. Each time, I felt that I must die unless I could return to sing in the willow trees by the lake. But the bars are strong. I sang here, and lived."

"Wouldn't it be better to die than to live on <sup>in a</sup> horrible cage?" asked Kenneth, jumping against the bars of his in his eagerness to be free. "I would rather be dead than live here another day."

"Hope never dies," answered the grosbeak patiently.

"Some day the woman who brings us food and water may forget to close the cage door, as happened last month with the mockingbird. After four years in prison, he was free again."

"Yes, hope never dies while life goes on," said the slate-colored bird on the opposite side of Kenneth, who had been listening intently to the conversation.

"Who are you?" asked Kenneth. "My name is Kenneth Colton. I'm not really an oriole, but a boy who was turned into one so that he could fly to the tropics."

"Men call me the Slate-colored Solitaire," replied the bird. "I am related to the thrushes and the bluebirds. I was snared in the forests of Vera Paz, and brought here to be sold in the market."

"And how can you sing so sweetly in this wretched place?" asked Kenneth.

"I sing because my song carries me back to the dim, ferny forests of Vera Paz, where I was hatched in a mossy nest beneath tall sweet gum trees and magnolias. They can keep my body here in this cruel cage, but they can't imprison my spirit. You must sing, too, my handsome friend. It is your only means of escape. You must sing, or you will die of sorrow."

After a while, the conversation lagged, then stopped. Kenneth started to think. He was not so sure that singing was his only means of escape. He was born a <sup>human</sup> man, and even now when he wore feathers, he retained some of man's mechanical sense—a sense poorly developed in birds. He examined the fastenings of his cage door, as most of his fellow captives had never thought of doing. The door was kept closed by a wire clip, and he knew exactly how to open it. He pulled and pushed at the clip with his bill, but it would not come undone. He tried again and again, until he was exhausted by the effort, but always with the same disheartening result. He had the intelligence to open the cage, but he lacked the strength.

When he was tired of pushing at the clip, he perched very still, thinking. While yesterday he thought: "What will happen to me?" and "Will I ever see my home again?" now he



thought: "How can I get out of this, and how soon?" He was making progress.

Kenneth thought and thought, and after a while he remembered that Mr. Oriole had told him that when he pulled all his feathers out he would become a boy again. That was it! When he became a boy, they could not keep him in the cage. He would be strong enough to tear it to pieces.

He plucked a bright orange feather from his breast. It hurt more than pulling out a hair. He took another in his bill and pulled it loose. Another sharp twinge of pain! It promised to be very painful, this business of plucking out the hundreds or perhaps thousands of feathers that covered him. But he had heard it said that only the brave can be free. No matter how much it hurt, he would tear off all his feathers, become a boy again, and be free.

He plucked a feather from his back. It hurt worse than the others that he had pulled. The pain made him stop and think. Suppose he did remove all his feathers, would he become a boy immediately, or would it be necessary for Mr. Oriole to sing a Magic Incantation, as he did when he gave the children the service-berry caterpillars that transformed them into orioles? And even if, when featherless, he would become a boy without the Incantation, could he do so in this cage that was too small to hold a boy? Would he burst the cage as he changed from bird to boy, as a cicada splits its skin as it is transformed from a wingless creeping thing to

a winged insect? Or would the transformation stop short when he filled the cage, and he be left as some horrible nameless creature neither bird nor boy, but midway between the two?

After a while, he became very bored with sitting in that miserable cage, thinking. Anything would be better than this. He must take a chance. He would pluck out all his feathers and see what happened.

He pulled out three more feathers, before the pain made him stop and think again. What would he do when he became a boy? He would be naked, and he could not walk through the town without clothes. He would take some clothes of the boy who had caught him, in the night when everyone slept. It would not be wrong to steal from people who had treated him so badly.

But how could he return home, after he became a boy? It was too far to walk; he did not know the way; he had no money to buy food on the journey. Mr. Oriole might turn him back into a bird so that ~~he~~<sup>they</sup> could fly north together; but perhaps here his friend could not find the service-berry caterpillars that were needed. No, he would go to Edward's mother and borrow money to buy a ticket to go home. Or if she would not lend him so much, she might give him a sheet of paper, an envelope, and a postage stamp to send a letter to his parents, who would surely come to his aid as soon as they learned what had happened to him. Mrs. Shore would certainly help him when she knew that he was the oriole who had done so much to make her Edward well. But no! she would not believe that Sun-

glow had become a boy. She would call him a lying little beggar, and send him away.

No, even if he could change himself back into a boy, his troubles would not be over. Maybe they would just be starting. The more he thought, the more perplexed he became. Finally, it occurred to him that, even if he plucked all the feathers from his wings and body, he could not remove those on his head and neck. So what was the use of thinking about it any more? He sat dejectedly in his cage and did nothing, while the grosbeak and the solitaire, and the other captives in their cages across the courtyard, sang to escape in spirit even if they could not set their bodies free.

Thus the morning dragged by, and half the afternoon. Kenneth was growing more and more gloomy, when he heard his name called in a familiar voice. His heart took a big leap. Looking up, he saw Mr. Oriole and Lucille perching on the ridge of the roof across the courtyard.

"Everything clear? Is it safe for us to come down?" called Mr. Oriole.

Kenneth looked around, and saw the mother of the boy who had caught him watering the flowers on the opposite side of the court, where his friends could not see her from their perch on the roof.

"Not yet," Kenneth called back. "Wait until I tell you all is well."

The woman seemed to take an unreasonably long time to water her flowers, but finally she finished and went inside,



leaving the courtyard free of <sup>people.</sup> ~~human occupants.~~

"Come now!" Kenneth called up to his friends on the roof.

Lucille and Mr. Oriole flew down with their bills full of measuring worms that they had found in the garden of Edward's house. Kenneth swallowed two of them eagerly. How good they tasted, after more than twenty-four hours without his accustomed food! Then he remembered his poor fellow prisoners, who were watching him eat, and had not tasted such food for a much longer time. "Take the rest to Mr. Grosbeak and Mr. Solitaire," he said generously. "I'm not hungry just now, I've eaten too much today."

"It was Lucille's idea to bring them," explained Mr. Oriole, when he had emptied his bill by delivering the caterpillars to the grosbeak and the solitaire. "We knew where you had been taken, because we followed you here yesterday. But we were afraid to come until we were sure the boy had gone away. We saw him on the road with his slingshot just now, then we hurried to you with food we thought you would like."

"What is to become of me? How can I get out of this?" Kenneth pleaded. "Would I become a boy again if I plucked all my feathers out now?"

Mr. Oriole looked down and saw the feathers that Kenneth had pulled out, lying on the bottom of the cage. "No," he said sadly, "it's no use trying. You cannot turn back into a boy unless I sing the second part of the Magic Incantation in the same spot where you became an oriole; and you need

more space than you have in this cage."

Just then a door opened, and the boy with the slingshot came through the passageway that led into the courtyard from the street. A little black-and-yellow bird hung limply in his hand.

"We must go now. Be of good cheer! Your friends have not forgotten you," Mr. Oriole whispered hurriedly, as he and Lucille flew up over the roof and away.

Although nothing had been said about how he was to be set free, Kenneth was comforted by the knowledge that his friends knew where he was, and had not forgotten him.

## Chapter 17

## DISCOVERY

"What can have happened to Sunglow?" Edward asked his mother on the afternoon of the day following Kenneth's capture. "He did not come with the other orioles yesterday afternoon, and he hasn't been here today. I do hope nothing has befallen him"

Edward, much improved in health and appearance, was resting in a canvas reclining chair among the rosebushes in the garden, while his mother sat beside him with her knitting.

"It's still early," replied Mrs. Shore. "Let's be patient. He'll probably show up a little later." She, too, felt misgivings about Sunglow's failure to appear, for until yesterday he had been in the garden with them every afternoon. But knowing how important the oriole was to her son's happiness and health, she tried to hide her uneasiness from him.

<sup>Edward</sup>  
~~Kenneth~~ remained silent; but his eyes roamed restlessly over the garden and the tops of the trees standing outside its walls, searching eagerly for a glimpse of the well-loved orange-and-black bird. After what seemed a long while, his heart beat faster as a brilliant male Baltimore Oriole, followed by a duller female, flew into the tall cypress tree. But in a moment he recognized these as the two birds who always accompanied Sunglow, while his particular friend failed to appear. Bitterly disappointed, he lay listlessly watching



the birds in the garden. Soon he noticed that, instead of eating the caterpillars they found, the orioles held them in their bills, as though collecting food to take to nestlings. Presently they flew over the garden wall and vanished with their bills full of caterpillars. Later they returned, filled their bills with food again, and departed in the same direction. Edward called his mother's attention to what he had seen.

"Can it be that they have a nest and are carrying food to their nestlings?" he asked.

"Perhaps," she replied evasively. She knew that this could not be, because Baltimore Orioles do not nest in the tropics; but she did not wish to alarm her son with her suspicion that Sunglow had been caught and was in a cage, to which his companions were taking food.

"I'm going to try to follow them and learn where they are taking the food. Then maybe I can find Sunglow," said Edward, rising from his chair.

"No, Edward, you must not," said Mrs. Shore firmly. "You are still too weak, and if you overexert yourself now, all your improvement of the last month will be wasted, and you will have to stay in bed again."

"Oh, Mother!" exclaimed the boy, almost in tears.

"I have an idea," said Mrs. Shore with feigned gaiety. "We'll send Benito to find out where the orioles are taking the food."

Benito was the Indian lad who brought firewood and took care of the garden. Mrs. Shore called him and explained what she wanted done. She promised him a quetzal if he discovered where Sunglow was, three quetzales if he brought the bird back alive and unharmed. A quetzal is a coin worth a dollar, and this was Benito's wage for a week. Three quetzales seemed to him a magnificent reward, for he had never in his life been able to save so much.

The following morning, bright and early, Mr. Oriole and Lucille began to collect food in the garden for Kenneth. Although they might have found food more easily elsewhere, they had a good reason for gathering it here. Benito was present, and following the oriole's line of flight, in less than an hour he learned that they were taking the food into the courtyard of the big house belonging to Don Ramón Martínez, a short way inside the town.

This much had been easy. But for a poor Indian lad in sandals to enter the courtyard of the Martínez house would not be easy; and to obtain the oriole, if it were indeed within, would be still harder.

Benito sat by the roadside to think, an activity which, from lack of practice, he found much harder than carrying firewood or weeding the garden. How could he get into the home of the rich Martínez family? Well, he might go and say that the cook was his aunt, and he had a message for her from his mother. This plan, which Benito hit upon after fifteen

minutes of hard thinking, at first pleased him greatly; and he decided to carry it out at once. He walked up the street to the house, and was on the point of rapping on the door, when a serious objection occurred to him and stopped his hand. The cook might be an ill-tempered old Indian woman, who would box his ears for his impudence. Or she might be a white woman, which would be still worse. He decided that he was taking too great a risk, and sat down on the curbstone to think some more.

At last he had it! He would bring something to sell. What would it be? His mind ran over the possible items. Oranges or some other fruit? He would have to buy them first, which would reduce his profits. Ocote, the resinous pinewood used for kindling fires, which he could cut from a pine tree on the mountainside? No, that would not do; it was so light that they would take it from him at the door, and he would not have a chance to go inside. But the mountain suggested firewood, which would be just the thing. He would take a great bundle of firewood to the front door; and if he were lucky they would ask him to take it right into the kitchen, which he supposed would be situated on the second courtyard at the back of the house. He would have to pass through the house to reach it, and as he went he could look for the bird.

He took his axe and his rope and headband for carrying the wood after it had been cut. It was a long walk up to the mountainside where the pine and oak trees grew. But Benito could walk all day, even with a heavy load, without tiring,



and he arrived in the fragrant woods fresh enough to begin work at once. He found a fallen oak tree, and for an hour applied his axe mightily upon it, making the chips fly and sending resounding echoes through the woodland. Soon he had a good pile of split firewood cut to the proper length. Then he sat on a log to rest and eat his lunch of tortillas well seasoned with fiery chili. His meal ended, he tied up the firewood with the rope and slung it on his back, where it was held up by the leather band over his forehead, across which a loop of the rope passed. Then he started down the mountain for the town.

Soon after midday, a dusty Indian boy, bent under a great load of firewood, knocked on the front door of the big Martínez house. A servant opened to him.

"Buy firewood?" Benito asked.

"How much?"

"Six cents for the bundle. It's good, hard oak wood."

"Wait a moment. I must ask the señora."

The servant disappeared into the house, closing the door in Benito's face while he stood beneath his heavy burden. After a few seconds, the door opened again.

"Four cents, the lady says," reported the servant.

"No! Look what a heavy bundle, what fine, hard wood!" whined Benito. "We must go far for firewood now. Give me six cents,"

"No!"

"Well, five cents then."

"I must go and ask the señora."

Again the servant went inside, closing the door behind her. Soon she returned.

"Well, five cents then, but it's a robbery," she said. "Take it around to the back door."

"Ay! let me take it through. It's so heavy, and I've carried it so far," pleaded Benito.

"Bring it through, then. You are small to carry such a big load," said the old servant compassionately.

Benito entered the great double doors with the load of firewood on his back. As he passed through the first courtyard, he managed to drop two pieces of firewood from his bundle, which he had purposely left loose. They fell with a loud clatter on the tiled pavement. With an exclamation of surprise, he eased his heavy load to the pavement and bent down to replace the fallen sticks and tighten the rope. Then he straightened up, and stood a minute as though to rest, wiping his brow with the back of a dirty hand and looking around. While bent beneath his load of firewood, he could see little except the ground in front of him. There in a cage, hanging in the center of the left end of the courtyard, was the beautiful oriole he had so often seen in the garden where he worked!

Benito carefully fixed in his mind the position of the cage, then slowly bent down to lift his burden, beneath which he passed into the second courtyard through an arched passageway separating it from the first. He deposited his load in

the big kitchen, took his five cents, and left the house by the back way.

Kenneth had recognized Benito while he stood resting above the firewood. He knew that Benito worked all week for the Shores, and was not in the habit of selling firewood. Either Benito had lost his job, or he had followed Mr. Oriole and Lucille to the house where Kenneth was held in a cage. The boy-oriole preferred to believe that Benito had been sent to look for him, and fell asleep that night with a new hope.



Chapter 18

RELEASE

Benito hurried home with his axe and rope, eager to report his discovery. He would have liked very much to bring Sunglow with him and claim three quetzales as his reward instead of one, but he did not dare to run off with the cage in broad daylight. He had thought of climbing over the roof into the courtyard at night when everyone slept, and opening the cage. Then Sunglow would escape at daybreak and fly back to the garden alone, and no one could accuse Benito of stealing. But this would be difficult and dangerous to do, because of the risk of falling from the loose tiles, and the likelihood of waking the people in the house when the tiles rattled beneath him, and so getting caught.

Benito found Mrs. Shore in Edward's room, with Dr. Rivera, who had been hurriedly summoned from the town, because the boy had grown worse during the day. For two days he had been worrying about Sunglow's disappearance, and his constitution, weakened by long illness, could not stand the strain. The doctor looked grave. Mrs. Shore needed all her self-control to hold back her tears.

Benito came to the doorway of Edward's room with his battered straw hat <sup>#</sup>in his hand. "Señora, I have found the oriole," he called softly.

Mrs. Shore ran to the doorway. "Where?" she asked eagerly.

"He is in a cage in the courtyard of the Martínez house,

where they have many birds. Perhaps they would sell him. If you give me some money, I will try to buy him."

"How much do you think they will want?"

"Who knows, Señora? Maybe little, maybe much."

"Dr. Rivera," said Mrs. Shore, turning to the physician, "Benito says he has found the oriole whose loss is making Edward worse. It is in a cage in the house of Señor Martínez. Do you think we could persuade them to sell the bird?"

"It will not be necessary to buy the bird, Señora. The Martínez are my good friends. When I tell them it is a tame oriole, and your son is grieving over its loss, I'm sure they will give it to you gladly. They are kind-hearted people."

"Oh, Doctor, when will you go?" asked Edward. "If I have Sunglow back, I won't need any medicine. Can't you go now?"

Dr. Rivera looked at his watch. "It's only four o'clock. If we arrive there in half an hour, it will not be too late for a visit. I would like you to accompany me, Mrs. Shore, if it would be convenient for you. You ought to know the Señora de Martínez, and this would be an excellent opportunity to introduce you."

Mrs. Shore went to her room to dress for the visit, while Dr. Rivera, who had studied medicine in Paris, sat by his patient's bedside to entertain him with amusing stories of his student days. Edward was already looking brighter as a result of the good news.

Meanwhile, Kenneth was perching in his cage, bored and despondent after nearly three days of captivity. He was thinking of the story of the prince and the swallow, and how he had wished to perform noble and generous deeds like the swallow, even if they cost him his life. But being shut up in a cage was something he had not counted on. He felt that he could not endure such misery another day. It would be better to die as the swallow did.

He was saved from being wholly miserable by the occasional visits of Mr. Oriole and Lucille. They would stand upon the ridge of the roof, where they were not likely to be noticed, with food in their bills; and when Kenneth called to them that nobody was in sight, they would fly down and pass it to him through the bars. At such times, they would have words of cheer for him, telling him that they were certain he would soon be released through the efforts of his friends. But these visits to the prisoner were risky, for at any moment the boy with the slingshot might appear. Kenneth tried to persuade his sister and Mr. Oriole to stop exposing themselves to danger for his sake. They promised to come less often, and to be very careful.

This afternoon, in obedience to Kenneth's entreaties, they had come only once, bringing him berries and caterpillars. They reported that they had not seen Edward in the garden all day. They feared that he had become worse.

This news left Kenneth more miserable than ever. He sat with wings drooping and head drawn in between his shoul-



ders, feeling that his life was ebbing away.

Presently he heard knocks at the front door. The old servant shuffled through the courtyard to open it. This happened so many times in a day that Kenneth had lost interest in it. He did not expect that his deliverance would come that way.

After a few moments, he heard a whisper: "Cheer up, Sun-glow! You'll soon be free." He had been so absorbed in his gloomy thoughts that he had not noticed Mrs. Shore's approach. But now, starting up of a sudden, he saw her standing with her face almost touching the cage. He also recognized Dr. Rivera, whom he had sometimes seen attending Edward. He was so overjoyed that he uttered a loud, clear song, the first that had escaped from him since his captivity began. On hearing him, his neighbors the grosbeak and the solitaire, and birds in the more distant cages, raised their voices in sympathy. For a moment, a chorus of joy sounded through the courtyard, Then it died away as abruptly as it had begun.

The servant showed the visitors to seats on the portico, where they were in sight of Kenneth. In a few minutes, Mrs. Martínez appeared dressed in black, looking tall and dignified. Her visitors rose to meet her; and she shook hands with Dr. Rivera and then with Mrs. Shore, to whom she was introduced by the doctor. Then all sat down.

They talked a long while in that language Kenneth did not understand, which he thought was Spanish. Apparently

their conversation was of many things, not all about him. He was beginning to fear that he was being forgotten, and was growing gloomy again, when he heard the doctor utter the word "chorcha", and all looked in his direction. The doctor was telling of the friendship that had grown up between Edward and Sunglow; how the bird had followed the boy all the way from the coffee plantation, when he was taken up to the highlands for his health; how his patient had grown worse when the beloved bird failed to appear.

Now Mrs. Martínez was talking, in a low voice and very rapidly. She was apologizing for what her son had done, saying she would have brought the bird to Mrs. Shore at once, if she had known how important it was to her sick son. But how could she know that this chorcha was different from any other chorcha?

Soon the visitors rose to go. Mrs. Martínez lifted down Kenneth's cage and called a boy who worked in the house, instructing him to follow Mrs. Shore with it. If it had not been almost dark, Mrs. Shore would have opened the cage door and released the oriole then and there.

So Kenneth was carried back to the Shore house by the Indian lad along the darkening highway. Beyond the walls of the town, they heard the Whip-poor-wills calling their names in the open fields, in voices loud and clear. They passed the dusky figures of men, women and children entering the town to attend the weekly market, which would open early the fol-

lowing morning. Some were bent under baskets of vegetables, sacks of grain, bundles of firewood, or great stacks of many-colored blankets that the women had woven in their smoky cabins. Others led squealing pigs, or carried chickens hanging head downward from a pole, with their feet tied together.

At the door of her house, Mrs. Shore took the cage from the boy and gave him a coin. Then she went softly into Edward's room and found him sleeping. She set the cage on a chair beside the bed, turned on the light, and went out.

Soon the light shining in his eyes roused the boy from his fitful slumber. He lay a few minutes gazing vacantly upward, then, turning, he noticed the cage beside his bed. "Poor Sunglow!" he exclaimed. "What have they done to you?" With thin white hands, he tore open the door.

Sunglow hopped out and came to stand on the bedspread, where Edward, smiling, gently stroked his back with two fingers.

Kenneth slept that night on the back of a chair in Edward's room. Free at last— free and with a friend!



## Chapter 19

## EDWARD'S NEW PLAYMATES

Now began a happier time in the lives of the orioles. After Sunglow's return, Edward grew stronger every day. Soon he could come into the garden to enjoy the cool, invigorating morning breeze, as well as the balmier air of afternoon. To make it possible for the birds to spend more time in the garden, instead of hunting food outside where they were exposed to so many dangers, Mrs. Shore had a shelf nailed up against the trunk of the cypress tree, and each day she placed there food for the orioles. Soon birds of other kinds discovered the table.

The variety of foods placed on the board was gradually increased to satisfy different guests. There were seeds for the Rufous-naped Sparrows and the Yellow-throated Sparrows, nuts for the crested Steller's Jays, fruit for the bluebirds and thrushes with rufous collars. Finally, Mrs. Shore ~~also~~ tied up a small tube of sugar water, with its mouth surrounded by a circle of red paper to make it resemble a flower. Soon the hummingbirds discovered this and hovered before it on wings beating too fast to be seen, while they sipped the sweet liquid. Before long, the garden had more kinds of birds than any one would have expected to find in a neighborhood where they had so many enemies.

One day, when Edward was reading a book while Kenneth

rested near by, a gust of wind whipped away the slip of paper that he used for a bookmark. Quick as a flash, Kenneth darted out, caught the paper in his bill, and returned it to Edward's hand.

This event suggested a game for windy afternoons. Edward would gather a handful of plummy down from tall purple thistles that grew in some waste land near the house. Then he would toss a thistle-down plume into the breeze, and Kenneth would try to catch it before it was wafted away. Usually he succeeded, and brought the down to Edward's hand, like a dog retrieving a thrown stick.

This simple sport soon developed into an exciting competition. Edward would toss a whole handful of thistle down into the air, and Kenneth and Lucille would vie to see who could catch more plumes before they were blown away. Sometimes each caught four or five. They delivered the plumes to Edward, who counted them and announced the winner. Mr. Oriole, the father of a family, was too dignified to play this game often; but sometimes, when he was in the mood, he would join it. It was thrilling to watch these brilliant birds dart and twist and weave through the air as they chased the floating white thistle down.

To reverse the game, and give Edward exercise, too, Kenneth or Lucille would take a billful of matchsticks or light twiglets and drop them high above the boy's head. Then he

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would catch as many as he could before they touched the ground.

Soon Edward was strong enough to walk about the countryside with his mother. Now in February peach trees were blooming, covering their nearly leafless slender twigs with pink. Tall alder trees were putting forth new leaves of tender green, while their long boughs were prettily tasseled with yellowish catkins. The orioles flew through the treetops while their human companions walked below. Mrs. Shore would allow no boy with a slingshot to come near. The birds could delay, searching for food among the tender opening leaves, and still fly into the top of the next tree before their slower wingless companions reached its foot.

One afternoon, while they sat in the garden, Mrs. Shore said to Edward: "Señora Martínez is coming to visit us tomorrow afternoon; and I asked her to bring Carlos and Elena, her son and daughter. Carlos is not much older than you, and will be a nice playmate."

"Carlos is the villain who knocked down Sunglow with his slingshot and put him in a cage. I shan't have anything to do with him."

"Why, Edward, I'm surprised to hear you talk that way! Carlos Martínez is a likeable boy, and it will be good for you to practice your Spanish with him. If he goes shooting birds with his slingshot, it is perhaps only because nobody has ever told him how wrong and foolish it is. Not long ago, boys in England and <sup>the United States</sup> ~~North America~~ destroyed birds and their



nests as wantonly as they do in Guatemala today. Now they have been taught better; and in those countries only ignorant or wicked children injure birds and other wild creatures; but it was not so when your grandfather was a boy. Perhaps when Carlos sees how much more pleasure we have with the orioles and other birds here in our garden than he with his sling-shot and cages, he will not use it so freely in the future."

"All right, Mother, I'll talk to Carlos then; but let him leave his slingshot at home."

"I'll see that he does," Mrs. Shore assured her son.

Kenneth, who was perching in a cypress tree, overheard this conversation. Feeling confident that his old enemy, Carlos, would be on his good behavior in the garden, he resolved to be present, to show Carlos what beautiful friendship existed between birds and boys in that garden. He hoped in his inmost heart that Carlos might even be persuaded to release his acquaintances, the grosbeak, the solitaire, and all the other poor captives in that courtyard of unhappy memory.

The following afternoon was mild and clear, with brilliant sunshine yet no oppressive heat. At three o'clock, Mrs. Martínez arrived with her two children, Carlos and Elena, who was a girl of nine, with rosy cheeks, beautiful big deep brown eyes, and black hair hanging over her shoulders in heavy curls. Edward at once liked Elena, and might have liked Carlos, who had bright mischievous gray eyes, if he had not known that Carlos had mistreated Sunglow.

At first they all sat on garden chairs, talking in that language Kenneth and Lucille could not understand. The orioles found it dull to watch the proceedings from perches overhead. While the people talked, a constant stream of birds visited the board where food was placed. Thrushes pecked into the strawberries; sparrows ate the seeds; jays carried the nuts up into the trees to open them with strong bills; hummingbirds hovered on wings vibrated into a mist while they sucked sugar water from the tube made to resemble a red flower. Soon the visitors stopped talking and watched the birds.

"I had no idea there were so many birds in this neighborhood," remarked Mrs. Martínez. "And how tame they all are!"

"That's because we keep no cat, and nobody here is permitted to disturb them," said Mrs. Shore.

"They are all so much brighter than our birds in the courtyard," continued Mrs. Martínez.

Free animals are nearly always cleaner and brighter than poor, spiritless captives.

Perhaps Carlos was itching for his slingshot, with so many attractive targets all around him, but he was too well bred to say so.

Soon tea and cake were served. Edward placed some crumbs in the palm of his hand and held it out toward Sunglow, who perched on his friend's finger and ate a few tidbits. Since becoming an oriole, Kenneth had lost some of his former delight in cake.

Elena, imitating Edward, also held some cake crumbs in her open hand. Lucille came down to eat them, to Elena's great delight. But Carlos did not try to feed the orioles in this fashion. Perhaps he felt guilty, and certainly he spared everyone embarrassment.

After tea, a breeze was blowing, and Edward thought it would be good fun to show his guests the thistle-down game. He cast handfuls of down into the air, while Kenneth, Lucille, and even Mr. Oriole outdid themselves to catch as many plumes as they could. Once Mr. Oriole caught eight from a single throwing; Kenneth broke his previous high record with seven; while Lucille managed to retrieve six. Soon Elena and Carlos were also throwing thistle down into the air for the orioles to catch. The game continued until the birds tired of it.

Then the children played ping-pong on the porch, while their mothers sat talking in the garden. The visitors enjoyed their afternoon so much that it was nearly dark when they left. Both Edward and his mother asked them to come soon again.

Before another week had passed, Carlos formed the habit of coming to visit Edward almost every day, sometimes with his sister Elena. Often, too, Edward went to Carlos' house. They played ping-pong and caught ball, and when tired of these active games, they would sit on the porch and entertain themselves with dominoes or parchesi, or looking at picture books. Or else they would wade in a little willow-shaded brook that flowed not far from the house. They started to



build a dam across the stream, to make a swimming pool, but this ambitious project was never finished. And when a good breeze blew, they played the thistle-down game with the orioles. These exercises made Edward grow steadily stronger. Carlos never went out with his slingshot now; he seemed to have forgotten it.

One morning, when the children were in the garden with Mrs. Shore, Carlos announced all of a sudden: "We have decided to open our cages and set the birds free. Mother says it is much more pleasant to have free birds around the house than birds in cages, and it is not so much trouble to take care of them."

"Why not bring the birds here in our garden to release them? They will be safer here than in town while they learn to take care of themselves again," suggested Mrs. Shore.

That afternoon, six of the birds that had lived as captives in the courtyard of the Martínez house were placed in one cage and carried to the garden. The other captive birds were canaries, who had been raised in cages for so many generations they could hardly live outside. Mrs. Martínez, Carlos and Elena, Mrs. Shore and Edward, were present in the garden to witness the liberation. The winged children and Mr. Oriole were resting amid the shrubbery, where they, too, could watch.

The cage with its six prisoners was hung from a low bough. Carlos opened the door. Gradually, one by one, as they discovered that they were free, the birds hopped or flew

out. The Rose-breasted Grosbeak alighted in the shrub where the orioles rested. In a few weeks he would fly northward, even as they would, after three weary springs when he beat in vain against the bars, unable to obey his strong instinct.

The solitaire with the slate-colored plumage flew to the top of a hawthorn tree, looked for many minutes over the countryside, then winged away to the east, toward the dim, ferny forests of Vera Paz, where he was hatched. The black thrush with the bright yellow bill, who had a wonderful ability to imitate all the other birds, flew straightway off to the forest of oak and pine that darkly crowned a distant mountaintop he could see over the garden wall.

The gray mockingbird lingered in the garden a few days, then vanished. The Yellow-tailed Oriole gradually worked his way down to the warm lowlands, where he was at home. Only the little Yellow-throated Euphonia, who had been taken while still a nestling and had never known freedom, was afraid to leave the cage. After a while, he gathered courage to venture forth and explore the garden, but every evening he returned to the cage through its open door and slept in it — poor, broken-spirited bird!

As the prisoners came forth and flew away, free again and able to find their own food, Mrs. Martínez felt relieved of a ~~burdensome~~ tedious responsibility, and Carlos was eased of a burden that had been weighing on his conscience since he had become Edward's friend. Everyone was glad to see the captives freed, but most of all Kenneth, who had known the misery of being shut up in a cage.

Chapter 20  
TAKING LEAVE

By the end of March, Edward was well and strong enough to return to his home on the coffee plantation. When Kenneth heard Mrs. Shore making arrangements for the journey to the plantation, he told Mr. Oriole, feeling sure that his friend would be glad to leave the highlands and return to the lower country where there was more food and less cold.

Mr. Oriole would not hear of flying southward to the plantation. He was pulled too strongly in the opposite direction, over land and sea to the elm tree where he hoped to meet his mate, where each year she built her nest. Now he sometimes sang a few notes, as though practicing for the longer songs he would be singing from the swaying boughs in front of the Colton's house far away in the north.

Kenneth and Lucille were happy with the thought that they would soon be safe at home with their parents, after meeting so many adventures and narrowly escaping so many dangers.

On the morning set for their departure, Kenneth found Edward walking alone in the garden. He alighted in a shrub in front of the boy and sang a sweet song, then he flew northward, as though to show Edward that he was about to go that way, but he circled around and returned to the shrub to sing a longer song.

Poor Kenneth! His heart was full of the things he wished



to say to Edward, if only for a minute or two he could utter human words again, yet he could only sing. He wanted to tell Edward how much he loved him, how he had enjoyed his company, how he hoped they would meet again, and that he would write as soon as he regained human hands. But he could only sing, and Edward would not understand what he had to say.

Yet the song expressed what Kenneth wished to say better than any words he might have used as a boy. Like other boys, he could compose in his mind a fine speech for such an important occasion; but when the time arrived to make the speech, self-consciousness and embarrassment would have cut it short. Had he been a boy without feathers at this moment, he would only have mumbled a few words, and perhaps pressed Edward's hand, and gone away without having said half of what he wished to say.

As for Edward, who was a boy with human speech, he could only kiss the oriole's head, and stroke him softly on the back, and mutter: "Thank you, Sunglow, thank you."

Meanwhile, Mr. Oriole and Lucille were flitting about in the top of the cypress tree, impatient to be off. Kenneth now joined them, and all flew high into the air, turning their faces northward. With tears in his eyes, Edward watched until they were three dark specks against the blue. In another minute they had vanished, leaving Edward with a lump in his throat and a heavy weight in his breast.

Poor Edward! Poor boys and girls everywhere, of all col-

ors and races and lands! Sooner or later, all learn that few of their most rewarding experiences begin without doubts and fears and misgivings, and few end without sorrow and regret and the emptiness of parting.

Mrs. Shore, coming into the garden, found her son looking sad and lonely. "What's the matter, Edward?" she asked gently, laying a hand on his shoulder.

"Sunglow and his companions have gone and I'm sure they won't return. Sunglow sang to me as though to say good-by, then they flew off that way, higher and farther than I ever saw them fly before," he said, pointing north.

"They are going north to greet the spring in the land where they were hatched, far away beyond the Gulf of Mexico. It is good for all of us to return from time to time to the land where we were born, and be for a while among our own people. Tomorrow we return home to the plantation, and then next month Father and you and I will leave for England, where he and I were born. There you will see the trees putting forth new foliage in the springtime, and the hawthorn in bloom, and daisies and buttercups in the meadows, and Westminster Abbey where the poets rest. And if all goes well, we shall remain until the leaves fall in autumn, and lakes freeze over, and snow covers the fields with a blanket of white."

~~And~~ she bent over and kissed her son's forehead.

## Chapter 21

## A TREETOP VILLAGE

Flying by easy stages, the orioles crossed high, cold, mountaintops where pine and juniper trees grew, then dropped down into low, hot country, covered with great forests. It was much like the country they had known when they lived on the banana plantation where they slept in the tall grass beside the river, only here it was much wilder.

One morning, the orioles flew into the crown of a huge tree that stood alone, somewhat apart from all its neighbors, beside a broad, shining river. As they approached this tree, it appeared to the winged children to be laden with scores of brown fruits that hung from the ends of the branches like huge gourds, only these were larger than any gourds that they had seen. But soon they noticed that birds were flying in and out of the gourds through an opening in the upper end. These seeming fruits were nests skillfully woven by the birds, like oriole's nests, but many times longer than those that Mrs. Oriole built each May in the elm tree.

The birds entering and leaving these nests were much bigger than the orioles, mostly of a beautiful chestnut color, with bright yellow outer tail feathers, black heads and necks, and sharp black bills with orange tips. On each cheek was an oval patch of bare, pale blue skin that gave them a peculiar appearance. As the orioles flew into the nest tree, the big



birds bowed politely and made them welcome.

"These are my cousins, the Montezuma Oropendolas," said Mr. Oriole. "You may remember that we met some of them before, on the banana plantation."

The child-orioles were greatly interested in these big, beautifully woven nests. Going to the doorway at the top, they cocked their heads to one side and peered down into the dim interior with one eye. Far down at the bottom, on a bed composed of many small pieces of dead leaves, rested two white eggs, or two nestlings that had hatched from them. From all sides arose the whining cries of nestlings clamoring for food.

The oropendolas' tree was full of life and movement. The orioles delayed among its boughs, resting and enjoying the bustling activity of this strange village in the treetop. Some of the hen oropendolas were still building their nests, and returned to the tree from the forest with long pieces of vines or strips of palm leaf trailing behind them as they flew. Then, perhaps after catching her breath upon a neighboring bough, each would enter her unfinished nest at the top and, hanging head downward, weave in the new material at its lower edge. Thus their nests grew like the sleeve of a knitted sweater.

Some of the oropendolas were lazy, and instead of flying far for more strips of material, they tried to pull away those that dangled loosely beneath their neighbors' half-finished nests. Grasping the end of a fiber in her bill, the thieving

bird closed her wings and hung upon it with all her weight, and sometimes she succeeded in tearing it free. Once, while one hen oropendola rested, holding in her bill some fine, strong strips of palm leaf that she had laboriously gathered in the forest, one of her neighbors seized the loose ends and tried to pull them away. The rightful owner, poor bird! could not even open her mouth to complain about this shameless conduct. If she had opened her bill, she would have lost everything, like the crow with the cheese in the fable, when he heeded the flattery of the scheming fox and tried to sing.

Other oropendolas, who had finished weaving their hanging pouches, were taking in billfuls of dried leaves for the lining. Still others were quietly incubating their eggs. Every so often, one of these incubating birds would become hungry, and leave her nest to fly into the forest for food. Her neighbors, feeling or hearing her departure, would leave their eggs and join her, and all would go together. The hens who had started their nests earliest were busily bringing food to hungry nestlings.

Before they had been long in the treetop village, the winged children noticed that the male oropendolas, who were much bigger than the females, did not help to build the nests, warm the eggs, or feed the young. They were gentlemen of leisure who seemed to take themselves very seriously. Now and then one bowed so deeply that he seemed in danger of falling forward from his perch. Raising his wings above his back and opening his sharp bill widely, he sent forth a far-carrying,

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melodious, liquid gurgle that Lucille and Kenneth loved to hear. Sometimes the male oropendolas delivered this call while perching on a branch, sometimes while clinging, head downward, to the side of a nest.

The big male birds often chased each other, but it looked like a game, for the one chased always retreated with dignity and avoided a fight. The hens who tried to steal material from each other and to weave nests too close together bickered more than the males but never seemed to hurt each other. After a brief squabble, two hens would continue to weave peacefully side by side. Perhaps it was better that the males did not help the hens to build nests and care for nestlings. There were so many more hens than males in the colony that every hen could not have had a partner.

Among the oropendolas were big cowbirds with glossy black plumage and bright red eyes. Mr. Oriole told the winged children that they were also distant cousins of his family, but he appeared not to be proud of the relationship. These Giant Cowbirds lurked in the treetop, watching the industrious oropendolas weave their nests. When <sup>a</sup>the nest was finished, they would try to slip in and lay an egg. Then the black intruder would go away, leaving the oropendola to hatch it and raise the nestling along with her own. Sometimes an alert oropendola would notice the deception and throw <sup>a</sup>the cowbird's egg from her nest with her bill, but most seemed unable to distinguish the cowbirds' eggs from their own.



The oropendolas often tried to chase the skulking cowbirds from their nests; but the black parasites would double back and, watching their chance, sneak into a nest unseen by its owner and leave the unwanted egg. Kenneth wondered why the oropendolas, bigger and more numerous than the cowbirds, did not band together and drive the black pests far away.

Lucille noticed that one of the oropendola's nests, with two nearly feathered nestlings, had almost torn away from the supporting twig. It hung insecurely by a few thin strands; and each time the mother bird returned with food for her young, her weight tore it down a little more. When the heavy ~~big~~ male oropendolas foolishly jumped on the side of the pouch to bow and sing, it seemed on the point of breaking loose. The nest promised to fall to the ground before another day had passed. It would drop the height of ~~a~~ <sup>an</sup> eight-story building, and the poor nestlings could not yet fly.

Lucille worried so much over the nestlings' plight that she could hardly take her eyes from their pouch. She thought that the mother bird would surely make repairs before it tore more; but when the oropendola came again and again with food, yet did nothing to strengthen the nest and save her nestlings, Lucille at last plucked up courage to speak.

"Please, Mrs. Oropendola," she said, "why don't you mend your nest before it falls?"

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed the oropendola. "How shall I mend it? We oropendolas build our nests once, as carefully

and strongly as we can. Usually they remain hanging until our youngsters have flown from them — and many months more. But if for some unaccountable reason they break away and fall, what can we do about it?"

"I could mend your nest," said Lucille.

"Oh, could you? I would be ever so grateful if you did. What can I do to help?" asked the oropendola eagerly.

"You could bring me some of those long, strong strips of palm leaf, or whatever it is; and with them I could repair your nest so it would not fall," replied Lucille.

"Wait just a little while," said the oropendola, and flew over the forest. In five minutes she returned with some fine long fibers dangling from her bill.

Lucille took the strands in her own bill, and twisted and knotted them around the twig that supported the nest. Then she wove the lower ends of the same fibers into the nest's wall. The oropendola might have done all of this herself, for it was just the kind of twisting and weaving she had already done when she made her nest. But, like many birds, she had less mechanical sense than a bright child of ten. She needed Lucille to recognize how insecure her nest was, and to show her how to save it.

"We need many more strips. I'll go with you this time," announced Lucille when the first strips had been firmly bound to the nest and the supporting twig.

The big bird and the small one flew off together, and soon returned with bills full of material. The new strands

were fastened above and below like the first ones, with the additional precaution that all were twisted and woven together to form a strong supporting band. When the oropendola saw what must be done, she helped with the weaving. For an hour the oropendola and the oriole worked together, bringing more and more strips of palm leaves, and weaving them in to strengthen the support.

"There! I'm sure that nest will hold up until your children can fly," said Lucille, when the repairs had been made to her satisfaction.

"I'm certain it will," replied the oropendola, "and if it shows signs of weakening again, I shall know how to mend it. How can I thank you enough?"

"You are very welcome," said Lucille.

"And now, if you will excuse me, I must hurry off and find food for my nestlings, who have become very hungry." And with this she flew away once more over the treetops.

"Come, now we must be going," Mr. Oriole called to his companions.

Regretfully they said good-by to the oropendolas and flew down the river.



## Chapter 22

### FRIENDS AND ENEMIES

The following morning, the orioles found breakfast among the trees along the shores of the same great river. While they were busily searching the foliage, two small birds flew past, voicing such queer grunty notes as they had never heard a bird utter before. Lucille was so interested in the strange birds that she flew after them, calling to Kenneth and Mr. Oriole to follow.

The strange birds alighted on barkless stubs of branches of a tall, decaying tree standing on the shore. High in the trunk were several holes with round doorways, carved into the wood by those industrious little carpenters, the woodpeckers. It was clear that some of the holes were new, for their doorways were surrounded by light-colored wood that appeared to be freshly cut. Others, which had been made by woodpeckers in earlier years, had doorways discolored by the weather and irregularly enlarged by decay. As the strange birds alighted in the tree, a woodpecker stuck his head through the newest of the doorways to see what was happening outside. He had a high, bright red crest, a white stripe on each cheek, and a sharp, chisel-like, whitish bill.

The orioles perched in the dead tree close beside the strange birds, who were about the same size as themselves, but stouter and with shorter tails, making them appear more chubby. One, who seemed to be the male of the pair, was a handsome bird, dressed mostly in white, with a pearl-gray

mantle over his back, black wing plumes, and a black band across his tail. He had bare, bright red cheeks, like no other bird that Kenneth and Lucille had seen, and a short, thick, black bill. His mate was darker, with grayish brown on her back and dull white on her breast, but her cheeks were bare like his.

The brownish bird carried some pieces of dry leaf in her bill, while the handsome male held a short, thin stick in his. After a short rest, the bird with the pieces of leaf took them into an old woodpeckers' hole in the top of the dead tree. Meanwhile, the one with the stick flitted among the branches, flirting his wings and twitching his tail, grunting and appearing impatient. After a minute, the brownish bird came out of the hole and flew over the forest. Her mate rushed after her, still carrying his stick.

"Who are those birds, Mr. Oriole?" asked Kenneth.

"They are the Tityras," replied the oriole. They are related to the bellbirds and the lovely blue cotingas. Mr. Tityra wears elegant plumage, but he is rather stupid."

Presently the tityras returned, this time both with bits of dry leaf. Mr. Tityra went first to the hole, as though to add his pieces of leaf to the nest that his mate was building inside. But while he clung in front of the doorway, something in a neighboring tree caught his attention. He looked around, at the same time opening his bill and permitting the leaves to flutter slowly to the ground. It certainly seemed that he could not keep his mind on what he was doing. When he left

the doorway clear, Mrs. Tityra took her material inside. Then both flew away together.

When they came again, Mrs. Tityra brought a twiglet for her nest; her mate had nothing. Then they went off once more, and both returned with pieces of leaf. This time Mr. Tityra took his into the hole.

A little later, Mrs. Tityra came alone to the dead tree with more pieces of dry leaf. After adding them to her nest, she rested on a neighboring branch and seemed in no hurry to go. Mr. Oriole took this opportunity to introduce his friends to her.

"What a pity my husband is not here just now to meet you!" she said. "He is a faithful companion, even if he is not very bright."

"We saw how he dropped the leaves that he should have put into the nest, and carried away the stick," said Lucille, to make conversation.

"That's not the worst of it," continued Mrs. Tityra. "Last year, before our nestlings hatched, he brought a big, green tree cricket and tried to feed it to the eggs. And later, while our nestlings were growing up, he brought a billful of leaves, as though we were still building the nest, and gave them to our little ones to eat. I was worried, fearing they might suffer acute attacks of colic; but happily all our family have always enjoyed sound constitutions, and they were scarcely upset. But my poor partner gives me many a scare. He simply cannot keep his mind on what he is doing."



"I cannot understand why an intelligent bird like yourself took such an incompetent partner," remarked Mr. Oriole, trying to sympathize with her.

"Oh, but he has the best heart!" said Mrs. Tityra, rallying to her husband's defense when she heard his character disparaged by others. "And he is such a gallant gentleman, so attentive to me, following me wherever I go. He is so handsome and distinguished looking, and so brave. I certainly never deserved such an excellent partner. But sssh! Here he comes. He must not hear us talking about him."

Mr. Tityra flew into the tree as though in a great hurry, bearing a twiglet in his bill. While he clung in front of the doorway, he dropped it, and this time it fell into the hole instead of outside.

"See! He is a great help to me. And after our nestlings hatch, he always brings much food to them," Mrs. Tityra whispered aside to her new acquaintances.

Just then a toucan flew into the dead tree. He was a bird three times as big as the orioles and the tityras, dressed in dull black, with a bright yellow breast, a white patch on his rump, and a red one beneath his tail. His enormous bill, long and thick, was beautifully tinted with nearly all the colors of the rainbow. Upon his arrival, all the other birds in the neighborhood became greatly excited, for they knew that this great-billed thief was hunting their eggs and nestlings to eat. While he perched in the dead tree, slowly turning his head from side to side to look over the situation, a pair of

yellow-breasted flycatchers, who had a nest in a near-by tree, darted past him again and again, crying and angrily snapping their broad, flat bills when nearest the green-faced intruder. The tityras flew about in great distress, swooping down toward the toucan but always veering aside while a short distance away. Like all small birds, they feared that great, brilliant beak, which was opened threateningly whenever they came near.

The toucan went to the tityras' hole and stuck his head inside. The owners dashed at him from behind; and once, when the dreaded bill was in the hole where it could not readily be turned against him, valiant Mr. Tityra struck the big bird lightly on his right wing. Finding nothing edible among the dry leaves of the unfinished nest, the toucan left this and dropped lower to examine the hole in which the woodpecker with the red crest was brooding his nestlings. As the toucan approached, the woodpecker drew down into the cavity where he could not be seen. The intruder pushed his big bill cautiously through the doorway, and the woodpecker struck it a loud blow with his own powerful beak. The toucan promptly flew away, without having found a single egg or nestling to devour.

While the big-billed bird flew across the river, alternately rising and falling in a wavy course, he was pursued by one of the yellow-breasted flycatchers, who buffeted him and plucked a feather from his back. In the air, the toucan could not use his bill to defend himself from such an attack. He had to endure the flycatcher's assault until he alighted in a tree on the opposite shore, where he could again turn

his menacing beak against his assailant. Then the flycatcher prudently withdrew.

Later that same day, while the orioles rested in a tree-top beside the river, they were aroused by loud, sharp cries floating up to them from the bushes below. Peering down through the foliage, they could see nothing. The cries continued, becoming louder, until the orioles could no longer contain their curiosity and dropped down to the tangled growth along the river bank to learn what it was all about.

A tanager had built a nest in a bush that overhung the stream. Now it held two fine, vigorous nestlings just beginning to become feathered. A slender green snake about a yard long, lying quietly among the green foliage that concealed it so well, had seen the parent tanagers fly back and forth, bringing food to their hungry offspring. The snake was at that moment sliding steadily through the tangled vines toward the nest, while the parent tanagers flitted above it with cries of distress.

The complaints of the anxious parents had drawn other birds besides the orioles. Soon a dozen birds of seven kinds had gathered around the tanagers' nest, each screaming and scolding and protesting in its own language. Together they raised a babel of discordant sound — no sweet bird melodies at a time like this! Some of the bolder birds, including the yellow-breasted flycatchers, darted close to the serpent's head, snapping their bills when nearest it. All were greatly



excited and disturbed, but none dared to meet the snake face to face and try to stop its advance.

Now the snake's green head was less than a foot from the tanager nestlings. The poor mother bird, usually so timid, summoned all her courage and flitted up to peck the long, thin body near its middle. The snake appeared not to notice the peck. Again the brave tanager pecked the serpent so much bigger than herself, but still it slithered toward her nestlings. It was so intent upon its prey that it appeared not to feel pain.

Kenneth was by this time so excited that he, too, dashed in to give the snake a good peck with his sharper bill. The serpent stopped long enough to turn and strike at him. He darted away and avoided the snake's teeth. Then the snake turned back toward the nest, now only a few inches away.

Now a shorter, sharper call rang out, a bird's cry of alarm at the approach of a hawk. All the varied crowd of birds immediately scattered into the densest tangles of vines and branches, as a black figure swooped down from the sky, rapidly looming larger as it approached, until it appeared of immense size to the small birds. For a moment, each lived in terror lest it was ~~been~~ the one singled out to be the hawk's victim.

When the first surge of terror had passed, and the birds peered out from their places of refuge, they saw the big black hawk rising into the air with the long green snake

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writhing and twisting in his strong talons. When he was high enough, the hawk circled around, screaming shrilly in triumph, then flew off over the treetops to bear his prey to his mate and little hawklets in their bulky nest of sticks.

The parent tanagers hurried back and found their two nestlings crouching unharmed in their round cradle. The hawk had unintentionally rescued them from the very jaws of death. Now they were hungry, and kept their parents busy for the next hour filling them with food.

Lucille had been so frightened when the hawk dashed down that five minutes passed before she recovered the use of her voice. Then, feeling a great need to express her pent-up feelings, she turned to a tiny, sharp-billed bird with a yellow breast who happened to be perching near, and exclaimed: "Oh, what a scare! I thought that my end had come for sure. I am so dreadfully afraid of <sup>#</sup>hawks."

"Well, it certainly pays to be wary of them at all times," said the Bananaquit. "Some kinds of hawks are dreadful, but others are among the best friends that we birds have, for they destroy the snakes that eat our eggs and nestlings, and would swallow us alive, too, if they could catch us. The best of all the hawks is the Laughing Falcon that wears the black mask. It eats hardly anything but snakes, and has never been known to harm one of us. I never budge from my perch when a Laughing Falcon flies by. The Common Black Hawk, too, destroys many snakes, and is not likely to molest a bird when it can find other food. But keep a watchful eye open for that

horrid little black falcon with a white throat and chestnut belly. He is a perfect fiend, with the heart of a snake and the speed of a swift. God help the small bird that the white-throated Bat Falcon sees flying far from shelter!"

Then the talkative little bird flew to a cluster of fluffy white florets and pushed in his sharp bill to suck the sweet nectar.



Chapter 23  
THE HOMECOMING

Now that the sun had swung northward across the equator and each day at noon stood higher in the sky, a call went forth over all the northern continents and islands: Rise up! Come forth! Grow! Perfect yourself! Multiply your kind! For six months the southern half of the earth has enjoyed the favor of my constant presence, I distribute my blessings impartially to the hemispheres. Now is the turn of the North."

From Mexico to Alaska, from India to Kamchatka, from Morocco to Lapland; by the Mississippi and the Susquehanna and the Columbia; by the Yangtze and the Amur, the Lena and the Ob; by the Volga, the Po, the Tagus and the Thames; in the Faeroes and the Aleutians and Newfoundland and Sakhalin, a myrian myriad living things heard the summons and began to stir and prepare themselves for the great event. Not one that was truly alive could fail to hear the command; not one that heard dared disobey: for the call was the call of the lord of all the life that we know, the voice was the voice of the sun.

Millions of millions of infant leaves, tightly packed in their winter cradles on untold millions of trees, felt the kiss of the returning sun and started to swell and push apart the little bud scales that had protected them well through long snowy months. Myriads of tender herbs, which all through

the winter had slept soundly in the frozen soil, beneath fallen leaves and snow, heard the summons of the sun, and drowsily stretched themselves, and prepared to push their green shoots and lovely flowers above ground in the first mild spring days. No northern plant was too great or too small to receive and obey the sun's firm command. The oak and the elm and the tulip tree heard no less than the violet, the spring beauty, and the anemone. The towering pine and the spiring spruce and the slender larch obeyed with the same unquestioning faith as the twin flower, the trillium and the little goldthread. Lilacs heard, and lovely rhodora, and redbud and dogwood and arbutus.

The great bears heard and bestirred themselves in the remote dens where they <sup>had</sup> slept away the months of cold and hunger, no less than the lithesome little chipmunks in their snug burrows. Frogs heard where they lay dormant in the mud at the bottoms of ponds, and newts and salamanders received the call beneath the stones in the clear flowing rivulets. Countless millions of insects of countless kinds sensed the kindly voice; butterflies heard in their cozy cocoons, and dragonfly nymphs among the waterweeds. Soon the air would be full again of filmy and scaly wings. And in the vast oceans and all the lakes, fishes and crabs and snails and worms, and a multitude of creatures unnamed by common men, heard the clear command no less than the creatures of the land.

Even in the parts of the northern half of the earth that

never knew snow nor ice nor great cold, the return of the sun to a higher course through the sky brought great changes. Trees that had been green throughout the year now covered themselves with bloom, golden or lavender or pink or blue. Birds who had never suffered from hunger or cold, who had never been an hour's steady flight from their birthplaces, broke into renewed song after months of silence. New nests appeared in shrubs and trees that throughout the long year bore foliage to shelter them.

Perhaps it was because he now heard so many birds singing blithely on all sides that Mr. Oriole thought more and more about the elm tree where his own song was best. Perhaps it was because he saw so many birds carrying straws and twigs for their nests, or sitting quietly on their eggs, or bringing food to nestlings, that he remembered it was almost time for his own mate to weave her nest and lay her eggs. However that may be, now that the sun was swinging northward, he felt more and more strongly the pull of the Northland. Now and again he whistled a few clear notes, as though practicing for the fuller song he would soon send forth from the elm tree. And many birds of other kinds, who would make the same long journey as the orioles, began to sing while still one or two thousand miles from the places where they would nest.

Then, one warm night in mid-April, after the orioles had gone to roost in a tree beside the great Usumacinta River, where Guatemala lay on the east and Mexico on the west, the pull of the Northland became too strong to resist. Last Sept-



ember, Mr. Oriole could think of little except the wind in the palm trees, ~~and~~ the sweet nectar of the white banana flowers, and the delights of a verdant land where snow never falls. Now, seven months later, with these delights all around him, he thought of apple blossoms and cherry trees, and stately elms with fresh, expanding foliage, and he was ready to undertake a long, dangerous journey to return to them. Thus do our needs change with the flight of time!

Mr. Oriole roused Kenneth and Lucille, and the three soared up into the mild night air, and turned their heads northward. Homeward bound at last, facing the last perilous passage that separated them from their loved home; homeward with their memories stored with so many unforgettable sights and adventures!

Northward they flew, in company with a multitude of other small travelers, over the land, over the water, then over the land once more. At this season, there were no terrible hurricanes to blow them from their course and threaten to overwhelm them far out at sea. Flying steadily all night and into the following day, they crossed five hundred miles of open water from Yucatán to Louisiana, where they stopped for rest and refreshment.

Then they flew over fields freshly plowed, and woodlands stirring with the spring awakening, and swamps from which the peeping and croaking chorus of ten thousand frogs arose. By day they searched for food among fresh, tender, unfolding leaves, or ventured into orchards to seek tiny creatures amid

the massed white blossoms of apple or pear, or visited some fine old garden lovely with lilac and mock orange and rhododendron and the last golden blossoms of the early forsythia.

They enjoyed a glorious journey, northward into this broad awakening land, with short, easy stages by night, and all day to revel among bright new foliage and opening flowers. The early robins caroled joyously among the trees; bluebirds warbled softly as they roamed over freshly plowed fields; and cardinals made streaks of flame as they flew among the boughs, exulting in the return of warmth and sunshine after enduring long months of bleak and snowy weather.

Each day brought the orioles nearer home. They looked forward to a swift and safe return, when of a sudden, out of the northwest, rushed fierce icy blasts, shriveling tender new growths, blighting the blossoms of fruit trees, numbing and killing early insects.

The late blizzard caught the birds as they flew northward through the night, making them seek refuge from its stinging force among the trees. Dawn revealed a thin blanket of snow over all the land. Miserably cold and wet and hungry, they tried to find breakfast among the snow-laden branches and blighted, wilting foliage. But insects were scarce, for most had fallen frozen to the ground. Here and there they discovered a torpid, motionless caterpillar or a frozen spider, but they could not find enough of this food to satisfy them. They needed more nourishment than usual to keep them warm in this cold weather, but they found much less. Finally, they

were forced to eke out their meal with such ~~poor~~ dried and shriveled berries as they could find still hanging on bushes and vines, poor remnants of last autumn's bounty.

Cardinals, chickadees, titmice, and nuthatches did not seem to be distressed by this unseasonably cold weather. ~~They~~ During the past winter they had lived through days much bleaker and snows much deeper. The difficulty of finding food only made them search more actively among the trees. And in the top of an oak tree, the orioles saw a crow sitting calmly in her bulky nest of coarse sticks with a fringe of snow around its rim, keeping her eggs warm through all the bad weather.

But the poor little phoebes, who had plastered their nests of mud beneath bridges and in old abandoned buildings, where they expected they would be sheltered from ~~the~~ harsh weather, were forced to let their eggs become chilled while they searched for enough food to keep themselves alive.

Worst of all fared the newcomers from warm lands far to the south, most of whom had never felt such cold. And of these the little wood warblers, so prettily clad in varied colors, were the hardest hit. Before noon, the orioles noticed many sitting forlornly with their feathers fluffed out, too weak and discouraged to search for the food they needed desperately to preserve life. Before nightfall, brightly colored warblers were lying cold and stiff on the snow. How sad, thought Kenneth, to come so far, with such high hopes, only



to die! As they went to roost early that evening, cold and weak with hunger, a chilling fear stole over him. Would he drop dead from his perch during the night, after traveling so far and overcoming so many perils?

Just as the winged children were forgetting hunger and cold in the kindly drowsiness that crept over them, they were aroused by Mr. Oriole. "Come!" he called. "We must continue onward."

"Oh, please, Mr. Oriole, not tonight," pleaded Lucille. "This one night let us rest. We're so tired and cold."

"Yes, do let us rest tonight," added Kenneth. "We've had so little to eat all day that I don't feel strong enough to fly now."

"It's just for that reason that we must go now," said Mr. Oriole. "If this cold weather continues tomorrow, by tomorrow night we shall be much weaker, and we shall most likely drop dead of cold and starvation. But if we travel hard tonight, by daybreak we should reach home, where you can get into your warm beds, and find all the food and rest you need."

Weary and miserable as they were, Lucille and Kenneth were cheered by the thought of being so near home. The prospect of being again with their parents by dawn gave them new hope and courage. But they did not fail to think about the welfare of their guide who had shared so many dangers with them.

"Oh, good, Mr. Oriole!" exclaimed Kenneth, "You must

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stay in the house, too, where you will be warm; and we'll give you all the food you need, until the weather improves and spring returns."

"Come, then, let us be off!" said Mr. Oriole, springing into the air.

All that cold night they flew stubbornly northward, seeking refuge from the snow in a region still colder. They became so weary that they ceased to feel weariness any more, and so cold that cold no longer troubled them. Onward they flew, and onward, over woodland and fields, over hills and rivers and sleeping villages. Toward morning, the last thin sliver of the waning moon rose into the sky and shed a glimmer of light over the snow-whitened countryside. By its pale beams they could see that they were approaching a city that looked familiar. They recognized the big dome of the city hall, and the high school, and the park with the river winding through it. Their hearts and their wings beat faster as they came in sight of well-known landmarks. A few minutes more, and they dropped down to rest in the elm tree in front of their own home, their long journey safely finished.

They rested a minute among the nearly naked boughs, shivering with cold. "I hope a window is open somewhere," said Lucille.

They flew around the house to the back, where their own bedroom looked out upon the big oak tree. Yes! there was the window standing open, just as they had left it so many months ago. The wan moonbeams were falling into the room through the

the open window. The birds were glad to follow the moon-beams and escape the cold outside. By the dim light within, they could hardly distinguish their two beds, made up with the covers turned back at one side, standing ready for them after so long an absence.

"Get into your beds now, under the covers, and I shall make you human children again," commanded Mr. Oriole.

"How can we thank you enough for all you have done for us?" asked Kenneth.

"Is it going to hurt when you pull our feathers out?" asked Lucille.

"Where is Mrs. Oriole? Hasn't she returned yet? Aren't you worried about her?" Kenneth asked.

"You won't forget to stay in the house where it is warm and we can feed you until the weather improves," said his sister.

Now that they were about to lose the ability to speak to Mr. Oriole in his own language, they wished to say so many things, and so little time remained!

"No, I'm not worried about Mrs. Oriole, for she usually arrives a few days after I do. And it won't hurt when I pluck your feathers out, for you will be sound asleep. And I'll be glad to stay indoors and take your food until I can find enough outside," said the oriole, trying to answer all their questions at once. "Now lie down and close your eyes while I sing the second part of the Magic Incantation. Dawn is breaking, and we have no time to waste. Good-by, my friends. Soon



the weather will be fine and warm, and I shall sing to you from the elm tree, as I did last summer."

"Good-by, dear Mr. Oriole," said the brother and sister together.

Then they crept between their sheets and closed their eyes, while Mr. Oriole sang a low, rapid warble, strange and sweet. They were both so weary that they were fast asleep before he was halfway through the Magic Incantation.

...

"Come, children, you stayed up too late last night, listening to Mr. Fargo. Now it's late and your breakfast has long been ready. I've given you peaches with your cereal this morning," said Mrs. Colton, as she shook Kenneth and Lucille to waken them.

They opened their eyes and saw the room filled with daylight. They must have slept a long time, but still they felt drowsy.

"Do let us sleep a little longer, Mother," pleaded Kenneth. "We've gone so far, and seen so much, and are very tired."

"Yes, let us rest a little longer, Mother, then we'll tell you all about it," muttered Lucille drowsily.

"And, Mother, please give some food to Mr. Oriole," said Kenneth, as his eyelids fell together again.

Mrs. Colton spread a comforter over each of the children, for the August night had suddenly turned cold and wet, and smiled, and left the room, closing the door softly behind her.

An hour later, Kenneth awoke, and the first thing he thought about was the bright feathers that Mr. Oriole had plucked from his body when he was turned back into a boy. They would make a splendid souvenir of his journey. He turned down the covers and looked beside him in the bed, but not a single one remained there. He looked under the bed, and on the bureau, and in the wastebasket, and out the window; but not one oriole feather could he find. He called Lucille, who searched for the feathers that until this morning had clothed her, with no better success than her brother.

Had the oriole carried all the feathers away? However that may be, he had left the children memories of their journey with him, to treasure through the coming years.

## THE MAGIC INCANTATION

(Sung by Mr. Oriole to Kenneth and Lucille)

## Part I

Like migrant birds, let Fancy fly  
To strange lands far away,  
Wing forth across the boundless sky,  
And suffer no delay.

Let her go forth o'er land and sea,  
Eyes keen, and spirit bold,  
Explore each vital mystery,  
Each beauteous sight behold.

River and lake and snowy peak  
Spread out beneath her view;  
Palace and temple she will seek,  
And cities old and new.

Then let her rove through forests tall,  
Their mystic spell discover,  
And seek their creatures great and small,  
Their secret ways uncover.

## Part II

Like migrant birds, let her wing north  
As her long journey ends,  
To that dear land which sent her forth,  
To home and kin and friends;

Bring back the treasure she has snatched  
In strange lands far away  
To that firm tree where she was hatched  
Upon a summer's day.

Let her turn homeward, then, at length,  
Ere travel lose its pleasure,  
For home alone will give her strength  
To grow in fullest measure.

THE END