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A STORY OF THE BLUE JAYS.

There was trouble in the family of Mrs. Blue Jay. Four discontented, disobedient young birds sat on a branch, chattering their complaints in shrill, rasping tone. And all because breakfast had not suited them!

They were plump and healthy but hungry. The poor, tired, little mother had said they must soon learn to fly and find their own fruit and insects. This day she had been out since dawn, hunting dainties for her offspring; and had flown so far and made so many trips in the heat that she was well-nigh exhausted.

Besides she had had as yet no breakfast for herself. Four ravenous mouths had clamored for each morsel which she brought with her.

Now her patience was exhausted. "Henceforth you must fly, and feed yourselves!"

Four scared voices shrieked out, "We shall fall, and the white cat with the fearful eyes will eat us."

Mrs. Jay had told them of this cat who lived in the grounds and lingered about their tree. Now she grimly replied, "That is your outlook," and hit the nearest bird with her strong bill. It was so unexpected that he fell from his perch, and gave himself up for lost.

Somehow or other—he did not know how—his wings spread gently and the little body floated in the air.

What a delightful sensation. He held his breath in ecstasy, while the soothing, swinging motion wuffed him near a lower branch where he rested.

"Why, brothers, it is easy to fly," he called up but they were already floating near him. The mother had pushed them all from the branch. One almost missed his footing when alighting, and might have fallen on the ground.

The others chirped encouragingly, but no one remembered the cat.

"Let's do it again," they cried, "this is more fun than sitting on that tiresome branch."

Mother Blue Jay called sharply for them to be careful, and not to forget the cat, asleep in the grass, who was waiting to devour little birds.

But they cocked their tufted crests to one side most disrespectfully and scorned the warning. This is what one of them sang. The others joined in the refrain—

"Who cares for the cat with the awful eye
And the dreadful claws?" "Not I, not I."
"If she try to our branch so high,
We will strike with our bills from above
up there
At her greeny eyes with the frightful glare,
And pull from her head a tuft of hair,
For what care we for a greeny glare,
Or clawy claws that can tear and tear,
Now we can fly, we can fly, we can fly!"

The white cat asleep in the weeds, where the long grasses swayed in the wind, heard and smiled as she turned over toward the tree. The fur on her face hid the smile. She had seen and eaten many a boastful bird. Now she slept with her eyes—closed? Well, the foolish birds would have thought so could they have seen her, but the leaves were thick on the branches, and the branches, and the weeds and grasses bent over the cat—she could not be seen. Her eyes were shut, all but a tiny line through which she watched while she dreamed.

The birds flew lower to a young cherry tree. They wondered that their mother had not made them understand that flying was easier than sitting on a limb; you had but to open your wings and it was done.

You see they had only down hill, there would be the tedious return to make after awhile. They played on the little low cherry tree, from there hopped to low wooden fence.

Mother Blue Jay called, "Come back to the tree!" But the leader scornfully sang, "Who cares for the cat with the glaring eye?" And they all replied, "Not I, not I."

The sorrowful little mother flew nearer. They now playing in the grass. A motionless body crouched low in weeds, breathless, expectant.

The birds tried short flights, and on each return to the ground, approached nearer the rank growth of grass and weeds.

A sudden spring scattered them. The untried wings were not used to upward flying.

Two birds aimed for the branches of the little fruit tree and found a resting place; one reached a lower limb of the tall shelter of the nest, but one—how it happened, who can say?—flurried and fluttering, whirled upward, lost his footing and fell. A sharp claw entered the

little black ring about his neck, a heavy weight flattened the pretty dark wings, and he lay lifeless.

The other birds meekly followed their mother back to the branch near the nest, and gazed skywards, so as not to see the blue and white feathers scattered on the grass.

The leader shook his head with bravado and tried to croak his new song. "Who cares for the cat with the clawy eyes, and the greeny claws?" but he could not even get it right.

The other birds moaned, "Don't, we shall cry," and each one cuddled closer to the mother and whispered, "We are so scared. We want to mind, please tell us what to do."

Mother Blue Jay was sorry for their fright and did not scold. "Only," she said, "in the future be sure to fly upwards without stopping to look or argue when I say 'Beware!'"

Then she crooned them to sleep with this little song:

Little birdlings in the nest,
Go to rest, go to rest,
Tuck your heads 'neath mother's breast,

That for little birds is best.

What can hurt my babies three
While with me, while with me?
Sleep, my birdies, on the tree,
Mother's eyes afar can see.

Dainty forms of precious blue,
Safe from view, safe from view,
Brighter than the heaven's hue,
And pretty crested topknots too.

Little fledgelings, nothing fear!
Mother's near, mother's near;
Naught of harm can reach you here,
Hush, my babies, hush each dear.

The sun's torrid noon rays burned above the tree tops, but could not penetrate the thick foliage. All was silent. The calm of the day and the warmth of the air, with the song, lulled the tired little bodies to rest, and soothed three fluttering hearts. The haunting ogle of a cat was once more forgotten. Mother and birdlings were asleep.—Annie L. Miller in Church Standard.



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