

The  
LADY-WITH-THE-CRUMBS



*With drawings by*  
H·M·BROCK

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*With drawings by*  
H.M.BROCK

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# The Lady-with-the-Crumbs

## CHAPTER I THE LITTLE WHITE DOG ARRIVES

The little white dog stood at the top of the Ferny Path—the path that goes down the hillside, right through the middle of the Windflower Wood.

In addition to wearing a silky coat and soft brown velvet ears, the little white dog wore a really *very* superior look on the end of his nose.

He only came to the Flower-Patch House for part of the year. The rest of the time he lived in London. And he knew quite well how highly the postman in town thought of him, also the dustman, and the tramps, and the butcher's boy, and the man who came to look at the gas meter, and the coal man, and the old gentleman who bought Cook's bottles and bones—I don't mean her own bones, you know, but the meat bones.

And though he was only a small dog, he realized that he was a Very Important Person. Why, even the plumber was so afraid of him that he wouldn't let so much as a tool come inside the house, to say nothing of himself, till he was sure it was perfectly safe. And to make quite certain, he would put his head cautiously round the door, and inquire anxiously:

“Is that bloodhound chained up?”

No wonder Mac felt himself to be an altogether superior dog. Any dog whose full name was “The Mackintosh of Mackintosh” naturally *would* feel superior!

As he stood at the top of the Ferny Path, he pretended that he was hunting for burglars, and wild beasts, and anything else that would be likely to hurt his master and mistress, in the Flower-Patch House just above the wood. But in reality he was anxious to let all the other Little People of the Forest see that he had arrived.

He hoped they would notice how extra white he was. He had had a bath in town only the day before: and though he didn't like being washed—said



dreadful things and hid under the easy chair in the dining-room when he saw Cook getting out that horrid tub—he knew it was necessary for a Very Important Person.

Besides, people always patted him after this trying event, and said, “Doesn’t he look nice!”

The day before, however, he had a lovely surprise. After his bath, Cook had brought down his travelling basket from the attic, and said to him, “There now! what does that mean?” Whereupon he ran round and round like a top gone crazy, and went up to everybody, putting his front paws on them, and saying with his tail, his eyes, and his ears, “Are we *really* going away to the Flower-Patch? Oh, won’t it be jolly!”

Then he jumped into his travelling basket (he could open the lid himself, and get in, and let it shut down again with him inside it!); and he refused to budge for meals or at bed-time, lest they should go off and leave him behind, as had happened once upon a time. Oh it was dreadful that other time to see the luggage being brought down, and no sign of his basket! And it was more than dreadful to be shut up in the kitchen and *hear* the luggage being carried out, and *hear* the car drive off, and to know they had gone! Gone!—and left him behind!

On that sad occasion he went into his sleeping box and hid his face in his blanket and cried.

No use for Cook to bring him dainty bits, he couldn’t touch them. It was his master and mistress he wanted. Next morning he crept up to the front door, and lay on the mat with his nose on his paws, just waiting till they should return. And not a bit of food would he eat till he heard them coming up the steps to the door. Then he rushed round and round, and down to the kitchen: gobbled a bit of his dinner, which was on a plate near his box. But he couldn’t wait to eat it all. Back again to the front hall. Round and round his dear friends he raced, then upstairs at a rush to find everybody and tell them all about it. And then he never left his master’s side for the rest of the day.

So affectionate and faithful was the little white dog with the brown ears.

Then there was another time, when he saw some luggage in the hall, and his basket not among it—and when they went to find him he had disappeared! Everywhere they hunted and called that day; indoors and out. No reply. No little dog rushed up joyfully, saying, “What can I do for you, master?”

Fortunately, they were not leaving till the next day. But, of course, everyone was very worried.

Then when Cook was going to bed that night she fancied she heard a little sound in the attic. Taking a light, she went to investigate.

There, sitting up in his travelling basket, with a most anxious expression, was the little white dog! He evidently thought that if he sat there in readiness,

they would be certain to take him with them.

And of course they did.

However, he had not been left behind this time. He had arrived from London that very afternoon. And as one of his many duties was to go carefully round the Flower-Patch (as the garden is called), and the barns, and outhouses, and orchards, and fields, so as to make sure that every gate-post, and bush, and stone—particularly those at the corners—were just where he left them last time, he had started off at once to attend to this, his own special business.

In the course of his tour of inspection he reached the top of the Ferny Path—as I have already mentioned. And there he stood with everything about him, saying, “I am a Very Important Person. And don’t you forget it!”

He was just thinking that supposing lions or elephants were hiding in that wood *he* would soon clear them out, and teach them to attend to their own affairs, and make them sorry they had troubled to take a railway ticket from Africa in order to get there!

He was so pleased with his brave thoughts that he went on picturing giraffes and tigers and bears lying dead all around him, with his master and mistress patting his head and saying, “Good boy! Good old Mac! What a wonderful dog to have saved our lives like this.”

Then he knew what would come next—he was sure it would be a very big bone. And——

But just here his beautiful dreams were interrupted by a sharp little voice that called out:

“Hello! Cockie! So you’re back again, are you? Have you brought a little of your London salt to put on my tail? Ha! Ha! You haven’t caught me yet, although you’re so clever.”

And a ball of fur came out from among the brambles close beside him; right under his very nose, so to speak! And then up a big oak tree scampered a saucy squirrel.

His fur was reddish brown; his eyes were bright and full of mischief; his long bushy tail was all fluffed out as he trailed it after him up the rugged trunk.

But the curious thing about him was his face. At first sight it looked as though it was terribly swollen, poor thing, with toothache. In reality he was taking home a meal to his family; and as squirrels use their mouths for pockets, he had stuffed some nuts and one or two young larch cones in his cheeks. Squirrels are very fond of young larch cones.



He said a few  
more saucy things

But evidently he wasn't in a hurry; at any rate he kept his family waiting for their tea, while he said a few more saucy things to Mac, who was most indignant to think that, though he was willing to settle giraffes and elephants, he couldn't catch a squirrel, a silly animal like that, who was not so big as himself! Most annoying!

And he knew it was useless to argue with the creature; he had learnt that from past experience. So he merely said, with a dignified air, "In London, the animals of my acquaintance do not talk with their mouths full!"

"Ha! Ha! I don't suppose they do," said the squirrel. "There is nothing to put in them up there! Not a single walnut rattling down from a tree in all the streets. Not a mushroom growing on any of the pavements. Not a brook with watercress for tea running by the side of the tramlines. Never a plum or cherry tree for miles; no strawberries by the roadside—I know! The swallows have told me what a wretched place London is. How could anyone talk with his mouth full up there? London is where your friend Mother Hubbard lives. A nice state of affairs *her* cupboard is in!"

But Mac declined to waste any of his precious time on this exasperating creature, who was really worse than a cat, because it would leap from bough to bough above his head, and just out of his reach. So he turned his back upon the

squirrel and looked the other way, with his tail in the air.

Whereupon the tiresome little animal in the tree barked out: “Do you call that wispy thing of yours a tail! A *tail!!* Oh my! Look at it everybody. Just look at it!”

Mac was always annoyed when the squirrels gave their funny, scolding little bark. He thought no animal should presume to bark excepting a dog. He was conscious, however, that his own tail wasn’t much to boast of in comparison with the bushy thing dangling from the tree above him. So he carefully lowered his, and tucked it away behind him.

Then Bushy Tail, the Saucy Squirrel, called out:

“I’ll sing you a song, my young friend, about a dog who came to a sad end because he was so up-shus! Now you just take warning!” And he started to sing:

“Oh! Hi! Diddle Diddle!  
Did you ever see the fiddle  
Being played by the Man in the Moon?  
Did you ever hear the cow  
Singing out ‘Bow-wow! Bow-wow!’  
While the cat ate the dish *and* the spoon?”

“Oh, Diddle, Diddle Di!  
But I really nearly cry  
When I think of the little dog that laughed;  
For his mouth he opened wide,  
Letting all the cold inside,  
And they say—he died next morning from the draught!”

But long before the squirrel had finished Mac had stumped off in disgust, wondering whether all the Little People of the Forest were ridiculing him like that aggravating creature up in the tree.

## CHAPTER II

### HOW THE NEWS WENT ROUND

But down in the Windflower Wood, the Little People Who Live There had something far more exciting to talk about. From one end of the wood to the other the tidings went flying around—

“The Lady-with-the-Crumbs is here!”

Everybody started to tell everybody else the news.

“She’s here! She’s here! She’s here!” the thrush sang, over and over again.

“Who-o-o? Who-o-o?” inquired an owl, who had been fast asleep in the hollow beech, only the clamour woke him. “Who-o-o *is* it?” he asked again. “Who-o-o *is* it?”

“It’s the Lady-with-the-Crumbs,” replied an obliging linnet. “You know her, don’t you? Oh, but of course you don’t, because you always go to bed by day, when all sensible birds get up.” But seeing that the owl was beginning to look fierce, he added hurriedly, “I mean—er—hum—I mean, when all unfortunate birds who haven’t the dole have to turn out and work for their living. Of course things are different for an aristocratic gentleman like you.”

“Oh, do get on with it,” said the owl, “and tell me Who-o-o *is* it?”

“Well, the Lady-with-the-Crumbs doesn’t live here always, but when she comes and stays in the Flower-Patch House she gives everybody the loveliest things to eat. Puts crumbs on all the window ledges, and on the three bird-tables,—cake crumbs and rolled oats and currants and raisins and cheese (only Bushy Tail gobbles that up, first go). We have a garden-party there every day. Why don’t you come and join us like a sociable bird?”

“Any mice there?”

“Certainly not! What a question!”

“No good to me then. My doctor doesn’t allow me to take anything else. But how do you know she’s here?”

“We saw her dog just now. That’s a sure sign.”

“Chut! Chut! Chutter! Chut!” said a blackbird, as he always does when he’s cross. “Won’t someone pat that poor old owl on the back and send him to sleep again? or he’ll be asking conundrums all night. I woke up in a fright last night, thinking there was an air-raid, only to find it was that noisy wretch talking to his cousin across the river.”

“Well, if you won’t come,” said the linnet, “there will be all the more for us. Good-night and happy dreams,” as the owl was settling down again into its Cosy Corner.

“Much chance of happy dreams!” he grumbled. “Just listen to the cackle!”

And, sure enough, everything that lived in the wood was having a say on the subject.

The pigeons were planning to be up at the house as soon as it was daylight, and they were telling their children all about it. As a rule they send their little ones to sleep by cooing: “Take two pears, Tommy; take two pears, Tommy; take two *more*, Tommy, do!”

But, to-day, all they could say was “Oh the Cr-r-rumbs! the Cr-r-rumbs! the Cr-r-rumbs! You’ve no idea how delicious they are!”

Then there was Mr. Rook, who had been left in charge of the children while Mrs. Rook went to visit her sister, who lived across the valley in a lovely grove of oaks. Mrs. Rook had said she would be back before bed-time, and would bring the children something nice for supper if they were good.

Called out  
“Maud! Ma-aud!!”



But Mr. Rook couldn't wait till supper-time to tell her the great news. He

simply flew to the topmost branch of the tallest tree in the wood and called out “Maud! Ma-aud!! *Mau-au-d!!*” as loud as ever he could, and Mrs. Rook (whose name was Maud), hearing her husband calling her, was quite sure that one of the little Rooks had fallen out of the nest on top of his head. So she hurried home as fast as her wings could carry her, and entirely forgot to bring any treat for supper!

Great disappointment, of course! For there the children were, with their beaks wide open, expecting her to drop a tit-bit in. Naturally!

“Ah me! It’s a sad world,” was all they could say to each other, when they found their beaks were still open, and nothing doing, because father and mother were simply talking, talking, talking!

Mrs. Robin was also very excited, and only wished her husband would come home so that she could tell him all about it. But he was off, as usual, having a little disagreement with the black and yellow tits.

He said they were not to come hunting caterpillars on his Oak Tree.

They inquired who gave it to him, and what right he had to it more than they?

That was the way the quarrel started. But by the time it wasn’t nearly ended they had found such a number of fresh things to argue about that no one remembered exactly how it began. That’s often the way with squabbles, I’ve noticed!

However, Mrs. Robin didn’t intend the great news to be wasted. At least she would send word to her sister, Mrs. Twitter. Bobbie could take a note, as she couldn’t leave the baby, who was rather delicate. Bobbie, the eldest of the children, was beginning to be quite useful. Though his father said if he would only stop asking questions for one day the world wouldn’t be so short of breath!



Bobbie could take a note,  
as she couldn't leave the baby.

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Mrs. Robin was a very particular lady, and she liked her children to be well-mannered. She used to say to them, "Of course you can't sing like your father; *he* has the most wonderful tenor voice of any robin that ever lived. But at least you can speak nicely." And in order to show them how to do it, she



talked to them in poetry (except when she was in a great hurry and forgot).

Having written a note on the back of a laurel leaf with a pointed twig from a blackthorn tree (and it's quite easy to do this, you just try), she called Bobbie, and told him exactly how to get to his Aunt Twitter's house.

This was the way she told him he had to go:

“Round the shady corner  
By the hart's-tongue fern;  
Past the bank of strawberries.  
Then you take a turn  
Down the lane with nut-trees  
Where the rabbits play;  
Over clover where the bees  
Buzz about all day.

When you reach the foxgloves,  
Ring their bells and wait.  
Auntie will unfasten  
The prickly bramble gate.  
Say 'Good-morning' nicely;  
Mind you raise your hat!  
And—oh! be *sure* you wipe your feet  
Upon the oak-leaf mat!”

Do you know that robins usually put a few oak leaves for a mat outside their front-door when their nest is made in a bank, or on the ground? They do! So look out for it.

### CHAPTER III

#### A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

Bobbie found his way quite easily, and was hoping that his Aunt would give him something very nice to eat. But to his surprise she burst out crying when she opened the door, hardly looking at the note on the laurel leaf. And instead of telling him how pleased she was to see him, and how he had grown, and what a smart child he was to have come all that way by himself, and how was his mother and the baby?—all she said was:

“Your Uncle Twitter is gone! Clean gone!”

“Oh, Auntie! Where’s he gone?”

“How can I tell? If I knew where he’s gone, he wouldn’t be gone, would he, he’d be there!”

“Where would he be, Auntie, if he was there?”

“Where he isn’t, of course.”

“But, Auntie, if he isn’t where he is—I mean if he’s not where he isn’t—no, that’s not right—I mean, if he’s where he’s gone and he’s not there, why did he wash himself clean? It wouldn’t have mattered if he hadn’t washed behind his ears, would it, if his ears aren’t there?”

“Oh, for mercy’s sake, do stop asking questions, or I shall go out of my senses.” And poor Aunt Twitter mopped her eyes with her best handkerchief—a lovely silky one, which the spider next door had made specially for her, and given her on her last birthday, because she had persuaded Uncle Twitter to leave him alone, and not to turn him into Breakfast Food. You see Aunt Twitter found the long threads of his web so handy for a clothesline.

So handy for  
a clothes line



“Now go straight back to your mother,” she sobbed, “and tell her ‘Auntie says Uncle Twitter is gone, and she doesn’t suppose we shall ever see him again.’ Now, can you remember that?”

“Oh yes; that’s quite easy. ‘Auntie says Uncle Twitter says he doesn’t suppose he’ll ever see her again.’ ”

“No! No! That’s not it!” And she went all over it several times; till at last Bobbie had got it quite right. She gave him a currant to suck on the way home, and told him not to stop to play with any other little robins he might meet.

He felt very important when he flew back to his mother, because he knew he had some interesting news. He began at once:

“Auntie Twitter says he isn’t there; and he washed himself very clean, and he——”

“Who do you mean  
Washed himself clean?”

his mother asked in surprise.

“Uncle Twitter, of course. He isn’t there because he isn’t. And Auntie says I was ‘specially to tell you that if he was there he wouldn’t be and she wouldn’t know it, and if she knew why he was there, he wouldn’t be gone. She’s crying like anything into her party handkerchief, and she says we’ll never see it again, and, Mother, can I have my tea? Auntie only gave me a currant, and it was a very teeny-weeny one. Can’t I have some of the Lady’s Crumbs?”

“No, they won’t be put out for us till the morning. She’s always busy unpacking them the day she gets here. You shall have some to-morrow. But I’m dreadfully worried about Auntie. Evidently something is wrong!”

And so it was!

Mr. Robin happened to come in at that moment.

“I’m so very anxious about poor Auntie,” said his wife. “It seems that Uncle Twitter has disappeared!”

“Disappeared? Twitter disappeared?”

“Yes, Father: gone clean where he isn’t.” Bobbie didn’t wish to be left out of it, being the one who had brought the news.

“Clean gone, has he! And he owes me three grasshoppers!” Mr. Robin was decidedly upset. “Borrowed them that evening—why it must be months ago, when they had unexpected company to supper, you remember. Promised faithfully to return them the next week. And now he skips off without paying his debts. A nice state of affairs to go robbing a hard-working father of a family!”

“Mother, why is he robbing father of his family?” But no one had any time to listen to Bobbie.

“Oh, don’t worry about the three grasshoppers, dear,” Mrs. Robin said. “Probably Auntie Twitter will see to all that. But”—lowering her voice—“I am so afraid it’s the Cat! You remember, Mrs. Chaffinch’s cousin disappeared, and Mr. Greenfinch’s father, and young Wren. I simply dare not let the youngsters out of my sight, or I would have flown over to hear all about it. I must see her in the morning. It’s too late now.—Children! Look at the sun! It will be behind the hill in a minute!”

Whereupon all the small robins hurried home.

For it is a fixed law of the Flower-Patch and the Forest that, so soon as the sun drops out of sight behind the opposite hills, every little bird must be safely in bed, even though the fathers and mothers stay up for just a tiny five minutes longer. And it is another fixed law that, when the youngsters are settled for the night, the Little People of the Forest sing an Evening Song.

Every wood has its own Evening Song. They are not all alike. But you can always hear it being sung by birds and bees, and brooks and trees, if you stand quite still among them when the sun is setting on any summer evening.

This is the Evening Song that they sang that night:

#### THE EVENING SONG OF THE WINDFLOWER WOOD

“Hush, Baby, hush!”

The Mother Bird is saying.

“Bed-time is Sleep-time—

It isn’t time for playing.

Shut both your little eyes;  
The nest is nice and cosy;  
Then wake up in the morning light,  
All fresh and bright and rosy.”

“Hush, Baby, hush!”  
The Bubbly Brook is chattering.  
“Don’t be afraid if  
You hear the Rain-drops pattering.  
Some children like a Brolley—  
—Brella always dry;  
But little fishes love the wet  
To drop down from the sky!”

“Hush, Baby, hush!”  
The Silver Birch is sighing.  
“Star-time is Quiet-time,  
It isn’t time for crying!  
Sleep till to-morrow comes,  
Then wake, all smiles and sunny.  
For children with a Criss-Cross face  
Do look so very funny!”

“Hush, Baby, hush!”  
The Nightingale is singing.  
“All about the Windflower Wood  
Are bluebells softly ringing.  
Leaves whisper overhead,  
And say the moon is peeping  
To see our baby in its bed,  
And watch it sweetly sleeping.”

## CHAPTER IV

### MRS. STARLING OBLIGES

As day after day went by and no Uncle Twitter appeared, everyone looked more and more at the cat: and the cat looked more and more the other way. But, though they were all very sorry for Mrs. Twitter, work had to go on as usual. So one bright sunny day Mrs. Robin said to Mr. Robin: "As you and Bobbie are going up the river with Mr. Kingfisher to-morrow, it will be a good chance for me to get on with the spring cleaning. I've sent for Mrs. Starling, and we'll start nice and early."

I should explain that Mrs. Starling is the charlady. She's a well-meaning bird, and all that sort of thing. But she isn't refined like the most exclusive Mrs. Thrush, and she isn't prettily dressed like the tits and the chaffinches and the exquisite goldfinches. While her voice—oh dear! I really can't describe it! Though I dare say most of you know what it is like. For even in towns you can hear her loud shrill calls.

Then again, the way she gobbles her dinner is painful to witness—so unlike the blue tits, who take one tiny flake of rolled oats, and make three dainty, polite little bites of it.

However, Mrs. Robin sent her a note:

"Please come by Nine,  
If it is Fine.  
Then we can Spring-  
Clean everything."

Mrs. Starling said, "Right-o! That'll suit me to a T." And she arrived next morning at a quarter to eleven.

Now I dare say you know that birds build a new house for themselves every year. Some of them build two houses in a year—one in the spring and one in the summer. Birds don't go back to the old nest once the little ones have left it. Yet they like to keep in the same district, and usually build the new house somewhere quite near their old one.

Mrs. Robin was particularly fond of a bank below a hedge that had all sorts of lovely ferns and flowers and wild strawberries growing over it, with blackberries, and purple sloes, and crab-apples hanging over it from the hedge above. Robins often prefer to build their nests on the ground, rather than in a tree.

Mr. Robin, however, had been anxious to move. He said the Windflower Wood was getting too crowded with nobody-knows-who! The birds, from miles around, were trying to get houses and flats there, so as to be near the

Lady-with-the-Crumbs. It saved them such a lot of trouble if they could get those delicious things to eat without working for them. In fact, if the Lady-with-the-Crumbs had only lived in the Flower-Patch House all the year round, there would have been an extra one million seven hundred thousand four hundred and thirty-one added to the Unemployed. For all the birds in the valley would have given up work.

But when Mr. Robin spoke about moving, Mrs. Robin pointed out that it would mean the children missing all the nice meals—ready cooked too, a lot of them were—up at the Flower-Patch House. Why should they leave all these for the nobody-knows-whos to enjoy, while they (Mr. and Mrs. Robin) had to start life over again, and scrape and scratch for a living? Especially as they weren't quite so young as they were last week!

Mr. Robin realized the wisdom of this. He remembered, when she reminded him, how thankful he had been last year to take the children up there, and dump all three of them down on the window ledge, leaving them there, to eat and eat and eat until they were quite full inside—while he went off for a chat with his friends.

So, in the end, they simply moved farther along the wild strawberry bank, and started another new house only a yard or two from the last one. It was this new house that was to be spring-cleaned.

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“Is *this* where you're thinking of living?” asked Mrs. Starling, taking off her hat, made from an old tulip which had been just her size, but was battered and the worse for wear, as she sometimes forgot to take it off when she went to bed, after the brook water had been a little stronger than usual. She hung up her hat on one of the hundreds of little pegs in the hawthorn. Have you noticed the tiny spikes? So convenient the Little People of the Forest find them.

Then she put on her overall, made from some gaily-coloured autumn leaves, but getting a bit tattered by now, and further inspected the new premises.

“Can't say I think much of it, mum”—with a sniff. “Never did fancy these basement flats meself. But my fambly always was high-minded. We're used to being up in the world, you know; usually build near the chimney pots.”

“Yes, of course. That must be a very pleasant locality too,” said Mrs. Robin politely. But, all the same, she was anxious to get on with the work. Because, you see, she had been waiting since nine o'clock for the Right-o lady.

So she said, “Now I think we'll start on the walls.”

“Humph! Yes! Not much to look at, are they? And the room's dreadful small, isn't it? And stuffy! Makes one quite thirsty to look at it, don't it? By the way, do you happen to have a drop of coffee lying about anywhere that you could oblige me with the loan of? I didn't stop to have me breakfast this

morning, knowing as how you were in a hurry, and I never keep my ladies waiting.”

“Oh! Then I expect you would like a little something to eat now,” said kind Mrs. Robin.

“Well, mum, seeing as it’s time for lunch, I should think I would.”

Mrs. Robin quickly put some food on the corner of the table—that is, the flat grey stone they always used. She didn’t stop to lay the cloth of course, but just put a couple of ivy leaves for doyleys, with some little pieces of food collected early in the morning from the window ledges of the House, that made a really tasty lunch.

“I’ll start on the walls,” she said, “while you’re having this.”

“That’s right,” Mrs. Starling replied with her mouth full of bread and cheese, “I can’t a-bear to waste time.”

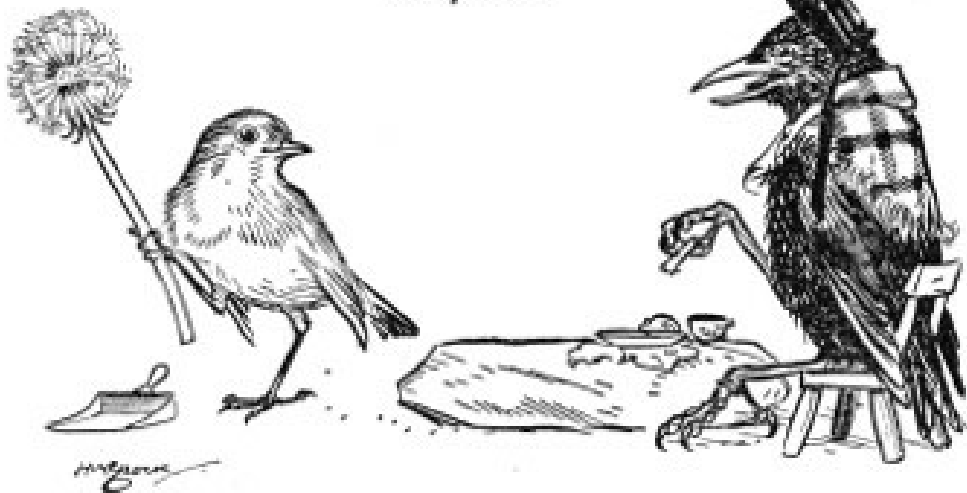
So Mrs. Robin worked away, and got the walls clean and tidy, while Mrs. Starling did herself very well in the matter of refreshments.

Just as Mrs. Robin was starting to brush the ceiling with a dandelion seed-ball for a mop she noticed a teeny trickle of water coming through. Evidently there was a spring somewhere in the bank. It would have to be stopped.

The water reminded her of Mrs. Starling. She had been so happy in thinking of the pretty little home she was making that she had forgotten that individual. Surely she had finished her lunch before this! Why she must have been sitting there a good half-hour at least! She went out to look, and behold there was Mrs. Starling fast asleep and snoring after her good meal, with her head resting comfortably on a clump of violets!



Mrs Starling did herself  
very well



Mrs. Robin was very annoyed! Naturally! And woke her up. Mrs. Starling said she wasn't asleep; indeed! In fact, never could sleep in the day time! Wouldn't dream of such a thing! She was only smelling the violets!

When she saw the damp ceiling she got interested.

"Ah! That's a plumber's job, that is. Bill, my sister's husband, is a plumber. He might be able to advise you. He's working up at the Flower-Patch House now. Filling up a hole in the roof."

"Really! A hole in the roof! Did the water come in on the Lady-with-the-Crumbs?"

"I should think it did! Poured in something cru-wel."

"What a pity! How did the hole get there?"

"Bill made it."

"*Made* it? I thought you said he was filling it up?"

"Yes; but he had to make it first, hadn't he? or there wouldn't have been a hole there for him to fill up, would there now!"

"How did he come to make it?"

"With his beak. He just hammered and hammered and hammered till he had ever such a fine big hole. He's got the best beak in the fambly, except my husband's."

"But how is he going to fill it up?"

"With a nest, of course. That's what he made it for. You may take it from me, Bill isn't one to work unless he's bound to. And if you don't mind, mum, I

see it's close on dinner-time. And as I feel a bit faint-like, I think I'll have something before I really start with the work. Spring-cleaning's a awful hard job; and one has to be strong to do it. And after all, how can one get strong if one starves?"

Mrs. Robin looked at the shadows made by the sun, which is the way all wild things tell the time, and she saw that it certainly was nearly one o'clock. So she got the dinner on the table, and they sat down to it together.

Mrs. Starling looked at the doyleys rather contemptuously while Mrs. Robin was carving the suet.

"I thought these common ivy leaves had gone out of fashion long ago," she said. "You should see Mrs. Bullfinch's new ones. Scented geranium leaves. All cut up and lacy and ever so stylish, and scent the whole place. And Mrs. Greenfinch has a set of apple-blossom petals for hers, pink and white. Very original she is. And they go with her dress too. I don't think dark green, like the ivy, goes with *your* sort of complexion at all. I should try a change if I were you."

Mrs. Robin's feathers turned redder than ever, and it quite took away her appetite. But she determined not to lose her temper. And as she finished her dinner long before Mrs. Starling was anywhere near the end of hers, Mrs. Robin said: "I'll get on with the floor now, while you are finishing."

"Yes, mum; that would be a good idea. And, by the way, I don't suppose you want that oak-leaf mat outside? It looks rather shabby. I should be glad of it, as there's a hole coming in the bottom of *our* nest, and it would be the very thing to patch it up."

"Oh, but that's a new mat! Mr. Robin wouldn't like it to be given away!"

"I see. He's just like my husband; wonderful contrary. But it's no odds. Mrs. Lark has several mats she's not using. I know she'll say 'Take one by all means, Mrs. Starling. You know you're always welcome.' Very generous *she* is."

After Mrs. Starling had eaten up everything within sight, including Mr. Robin's and Bobbie's supper, she sighed a very full sigh.

"There now. I feel better for that little snack. It will carry me on nicely till dinner-time. And when I've rested a bit I'll give you a hand with that new moss carpet. It wants a lot of brushing, so you had better get on with it till I'm ready."

"But you've just had your dinner," said Mrs. Robin in surprise.

"Dinner? D'you call that scrap a *dinner*? Why, I've only had a bit of bacon rind, and a lump of suet (which I don't think was quite fresh), and some bread and cold potatoes, and a mutton bone without too much on it, and a piece of sausage, and a cold sardine-head, and the end of a roly-poly pudding without much jam in it, and some stale cake, and you surely don't call *that* a dinner?"

Why, Mrs. Chaffinch gives me the most aristocratic dinners when I go there. She wouldn't expect me to do a day's work on odds and ends! But, of course, she's connected with very high-up people, who always build near the top of the tree, so she knows what's what. Still, if that's the best you can do, it can't be helped. But I wish that Cook at the Flower-Patch House had been a little more liberal. I thought that at least you would have given me a taste of roast chicken. I could have eaten that with a relish. My appetite's very poor and wants encouraging."

Mrs. Robin felt quite mortified to think that her dinner wasn't as good as the one Mrs. Chaffinch provided. But she wanted to get on with the spring cleaning, so she said: "Hadn't we better scrub the floor before the carpet goes down?"

"As you please, mum. I leave it to you. I always say, 'Let ladies do as they like. It's their work, not mine. And as they're paying for it, and not me, let 'em do it how they like.' You do the same, mum. I shan't interfere nor I shan't take no offence. And, while you're doing it, I'll have the ten minutes' complete rest the doctor says I must always have after my dinner to digest it—and he's most particular about it being complete."

So Mrs. Robin got on with the work, while Mrs. Starling got on with her digestion.

Presently she appeared at the door of the new house. "I've been thinking," she said, "you won't want that old moss carpet now you've got a new one. So, as I expect it's only in your way, I may as well have it. My Mabel is wanting one badly. She's going to be a prima donna. Sings wonderful, and never had a lesson in her life. Everyone admires her voice. Only yesterday she was practising her top notes, standing on the roof of the farm. A lady passing was very complimentary and said, 'They ought to wring that bird's neck.'"

"What did she mean?" Mrs. Robin asked.

"She meant, they ought to put a diamond ring round her neck, of course, because she's so wonderful. Prima donnas always wear diamond necklaces. I know, because I lived with one once. For, silly like, I made a nest in a chimney pot belonging to one; I didn't know then that it was a hole that hadn't any beginning nor ending. You should have heard her top notes when the nest, and all the lot of us, arrived down the bedroom chimney suddenly, in the middle of the night. And that reminds me of what I came along to ask you: Don't you have a cup of tea after your dinner? I do—and as you're so busy, I don't mind making it to save you the trouble. Always lend a helping hand, is my motto. And you're getting on so nicely with that floor it would be a pity to interrupt you."

When Mrs. Starling brought the tea in acorn cups, Mrs. Robin said:

"I must get you to help me shake these sycamore-leaf curtains. They are

rather heavy.”

“Well, mum, I’d be only too pleased to oblige, but school will be out directly, and I must be home in time to get my Jimmie’s tea. I’m so sorry, but I must fly. And if you don’t want that piece of haddock that’s hanging up in the holly bush, I’ll have it. My Jimmie’s so fond of it, especially when it’s a bit high like this is!”

But Mrs. Robin was looking for her purse, and did not happen to hear this last remark.

“We’ve done a nice day’s work, haven’t we?” Mrs. Starling went on. “So if you’ll give me my money, I’ll be off before your good gentleman returns. They’re all alike; can’t bear to see a bit of housework being done. My husband’s just the same. And though I work as hard as I do, I have to keep it very quiet, and pretend I don’t, so that he shan’t know nothing about it. I never dare let my right claw know what my left claw’s doing. And you did say I was to take away these ivy-leaf doyleys, didn’t you? They are awful ugly, aren’t they? And send for me whenever you want help. I’m always pleased to oblige. Good-bye.”

Mr. Robin came in almost immediately.

“Well, my dear, you’ve had a nice restful day I know,” he said, rubbing his hands. “No one to cook for, with Bobbie and me away. And Mrs. Starling to do all the work. And now we’re quite ready for our supper. I hope you’ve something special after the lovely day’s holiday you’ve had.”

“I’m afraid there’s only a bit of haddock, dear,” she said. “You see Mrs. Starling has such a big appetite and cleared us out of everything except the haddock. But I’ll soon have that ready.”

She went to look for the haddock. But alas! she never found it!

## CHAPTER V

### MRS. STARLING SEES THINGS!

Mrs. Starling was on her way home, carrying the old moss carpet, the ivy-leaf doyleys, an acorn cup which she had cracked when washing-up. Also the piece of haddock wrapped up in a primrose leaf, and placed for safety inside her hat. And just as she was thinking how very useful the fish was, as it would save her having to use any hair tonic that day, in addition to making them all a nice supper—the wonderful thing happened!

Not that any bird knows exactly what did happen, because accounts vary considerably, as I will show you. But it is a fact that when she was nearly home she gave a wild shriek, threw her bundle into the air—which sent doyleys, hat, carpet, haddock and acorn cup all anywhere—and sank into a heap on the ground. I repeat—a—HEAP!

Of course the whole neighbourhood rushed to her assistance, dozens of them; and they all talked at once, asking what was the matter, where it hurt her, and how she came to do it? Though there wasn't much need to ask her, because, apparently, everyone knew what was wrong. Only they didn't all say the same thing. Some were sure she had been stung by a wasp; some were certain the carpet had been too heavy for her, and carrying it had been bad for her heart; some, when they smelt the haddock, felt convinced she had caught appendicitis. While all of the older ones remembered that her grandfather and grandmother had both died once upon a time; therefore it didn't look as though there was much chance for her to go on living for ever.

They held the haddock to her nose to see if it would restore her. It had a little effect, because she did just wake up enough to gasp:

“He's blue and green—Oh! Oh!—and yellow!”

“No! No!” they told her. “It isn't as far gone as that yet, dearie! Why it isn't a day more than a month since it was in the water!”

She continued to moan, “Oh!—Oh!—and awful red—I saw him plainly—and he will eat us all up—Oh!—Oh! Don't let him get me—Take me home!” With that she closed her eyes, and never uttered another syllable. Not another single one, or a double one either, so far as that goes.

They carried her to her nest. As soon as Mabel saw her mother's silent form she flew to the very highest part of the farm-house roof, and let out all the top notes she had, and some that were quite new.

More starlings were soon hurrying up from the Elm Grove, three fields off, to inquire about it. The neighbours told them that she had been struck by a

wild animal, that was red and green and blue and yellow, and ghastly white with black eyes; and she had never smiled again!

Next all the Beechwood cousins arrived, and the Elm-Groves explained that a great monster had suddenly dropped down from the clouds, who was pink and purple and orange and lemon and scarlet and red and crimson and blue and pea-green and magenta. And he had clutched her so hard that it was all they (the Elm-Groves) could do to get her out of his claws!

By this time the starlings from across the river had turned up. And although they are not on speaking terms with any of their family connections our side of the river, as a rule, they consented to let bygones be bygones for the minute, while the Beechwood cousins told them how a great dragon had appeared. With fire and smoke coming out of his nose. And green hair done in long plaits. And blue claws. And a red tail two yards long that rattled something awful as he approached Mrs. Starling. And an orange tongue, two feet three and a half inches in length, that he had to tie to his tail to keep it from getting in his way as he walked. And this terrible monster had got her in his mouth, and was that very moment going to swallow her, when they (the Beechwood cousins) happened to arrive in the nick of time. And after a fierce and most terrible struggle, in which Mrs. Starling lost her best hat, they succeeded in rescuing her from his foaming jaws.

And they all shivered from beak to the endest tail feather, as they thought about it.

By this time there was a fair-sized crowd, as you will readily understand.

But still she didn't move.

Then someone said, "Let's send for the plumber."

Bill came. But he only looked at her and shook his head sorrowfully. "Not in my line," he said. "The Undertakers' Trade Union wouldn't let me touch it!"

"What about fetching the policeman?" said another bright bird.

Dozens hurried off in search of him.

But there was no sign of flurry or hurry or undignified haste about Police Constable Crow when he arrived. In a stern black voice he said:

"Now then! What's all this about? Move on there."

And he stalked through the crowd up to the family tree. "Oh! I thought it was a row at an election meeting. I see!" looking thoughtfully at the poor evidently-lifeless-body lying there so silent with closed eyes. Then turning to the crowd: "Did anyone take the number of the motor-car?"

"She wasn't run over," every starling began to tell him excitedly. "She saw things, and——"

But P.C. Crow held up a warning claw, and, taking out his pocket-book, he informed the evidently-lifeless-body that she must be very careful what she said, because he was entering every



word in his note-book, and it might be used against her.

As she still lay silent with closed eyes, he felt he needn't write any more. Besides, having heard all the facts of the case, and a lot that weren't facts, from the dozens who had fetched him, he had an idea that he would like to get home before dark, if that dragon was still anywhere about. So after shutting up his pocket-book with a snap and putting the elastic band round it, he said, "You'd better send for the doctor," and walked away majestically.

Of course each starling wondered why all the other starlings hadn't thought of that before, and explained that he, or she, was at that very moment going to suggest sending for the doctor.

Before very long Dr. Magpie's aeroplane was seen in the sky, and was soon moored fast to the tallest fir tree. A car would have been quite useless to him, of course, seeing that he had to visit patients who lived up in the air. Therefore he had an aeroplane. And if you look up, when a magpie is flying overhead, you can see the aeroplane's long tail and wings quite clearly.

Everybody stepped back, immediately, when he arrived, looking very learned and serious.

"She needs air!" he said (being an aeroplane doctor). "Fan her instantly."

In rushed several butterflies and fanned her hard with their wings.

Then her next-door neighbour, who had run in, as soon as they brought home the evidently-lifeless-body, to take charge of her, explained to the doctor: "She's seen an awful monster, yellow ochre and gamboge" (her little boy was starting brush-work at school) "and indigo and Prussian blue——"

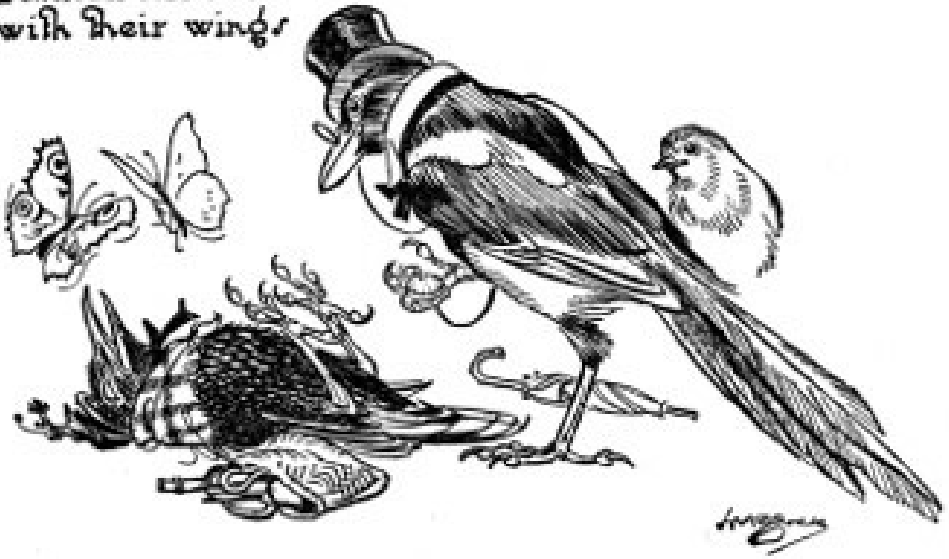
"Drumsticks!" said the doctor. "She's been having a drink out of that brook over there by the spotted cow. I've strictly forbidden her to touch it, because it's far too strong for her. She'll come round presently, however, if you keep on fanning her."

"But it was vermilion and crimson-lake and rose-madder——" the neighbour went on.

"Ah! I expect she saw her own nose reflected in the brook! But keep on fanning her." (The butterflies kept on.) "I'll look in again to-morrow if she

isn't better."

Fanned her hard  
with their wings



And with a *whirrrrrr* his aeroplane went skywards, and in a minute he was half-way to his next patient, old Granny Hawk, who was feeling a bit all-overish, after having swallowed the china egg she found in a fowl-house, in mistake for a real one—her sight not being as good as it might be.

Then the other starlings, who had kept most respectfully in the background while the doctor was in the sick room, crowded round to hear his verdict, after he had gone.

"High fever!" said the kind neighbour. "He doesn't give any hope" (sobbing into the corner of her apron). "May linger till to-morrow with care, but it's uncertain, poor dear; and she's the best neighbour I ever had."

"That she is," with sobs from the other neighbours.

"And he says she can't last more than a couple of hours. Fetch Mabel," the kind neighbour continued.

They all fetched the prima donna.

"Oh, my dear," wept the kind neighbour, "I'm to break it to you gently: he told me your darling mother will probably be gone in less than an hour. And you and Jimmie will be poor orphans—perhaps in *half* an hour." (Every starling was weeping quarts, excepting those who had left their hankies at home, and couldn't borrow one.) "If only she would speak," wailed the kind neighbour, "and say one—only *one*—last long loving word for us all to remember, I should feel better about it. But it seems so sad for her to have



started out this morning—

‘All happy and gay,  
So anxious to do  
Her good deed for the day.’

And after working *so hard*—” (“Ah! and she *was* a worker!” murmured the crowd) “to come nearly home—and end—like—this!”

Choking sobs all round.

And Mabel, not to be outdone by the others, cried so loudly that all the owls in the valley woke up—and the cocks and hens and turkeys and geese and ducks at the farm set up ever such a hubbub.

Now I can’t say whether it was due to the butterflies or to Mabel’s voice, but at that moment one of Mrs. Starling’s eyelashes flickered.

“She’s moved!” they all exclaimed.

Then she opened her left eye, merely a trifle. Seeing a nice large crowd, she closed it again.

“She’s recognised us!” three hundred and twenty-nine starlings announced in one breath.

Then she opened both her eyes.

“Oh speak! Mother, spe-e-e—e—ak!” sang Mabel, running up the scale right beyond the top of her voice this time.

Her mother smiled a heavenly smile.

Everybody said “ShSh! ShSh! ShSh!” to everybody else—and listened breathlessly.

Then she opened her beak the merest trifle, and only sufficient to enable her to murmur:

“I really think I could enjoy a kipper’s tail for me supper.”

That seemed to remind her of something. For she sat up so suddenly that she almost upset the nest as she inquired, “Where’s that piece of haddock I brought home?”

No one knew excepting Jimmie, and he said nothing. Besides, he had had a pain under his feathers ever since he ate it; and he had enough to do to think about that. No one offered to go and look for the haddock because—the dragon might still be there. Indeed, several of the company had remarked that the air seemed very hot and sultry, almost as though there was fire in the wood. And seeing that poor Mrs. Starling had now recovered, it might be as well to hurry home—in case of a storm, they were all careful to add.

And they weren’t long in reaching home either!

Yet—in spite of everything—the blue and green and red and yellow mystery remained unsolved.

## CHAPTER VI THE LOST ONE RETURNS

Since the sad disappearance of her husband, Auntie Twitter had shut up her house very early each evening, fastening the door most securely, while it was still light, for fear of burglars. Because, as she said, "You never know!"

She had heard all the riot and racket of the starlings, but as they are always a noisy crew, she didn't bother to go up the lane to find out what it was all about. They weren't quite her style; and she didn't want to get mixed up with any of their hullabaloo!

She merely took a look up the lane before she finally locked the door, when—to her surprise—she saw an extraordinary-looking bird hopping along cautiously, and keeping as much out of sight as possible. He had blue wings, a yellow back, a green head, a green tail, and a red breast.

She had never seen anyone like it in all her life before. Even the parrot at the farm was only pink and green. Then a dreadful thought occurred to her—this was a BURGLAR! Disguised, of course, to take her in! And he was coming up the path, too! She was on the point of slamming the door in his face when a familiar voice said:

"Here I am, dear. Back again at last. I expect you wondered what had become of me."

And though she certainly couldn't believe her own eyes, it *was* Uncle Twitter's voice, and Uncle Twitter's red waistcoat. She would have known that anywhere, because there was a feather missing on the front that she had intended to sew on again the very day he went away.

But—as for the rest of him—!! Well there!! All she could manage to say was:

"What—in—the—world—!!!"

And he replied, "Yes, I thought you'd say so. That's why I waited till it was nearly dark before coming home. As it was I happened to run into that old woman Starling, and she shrieked so loud that the people along the road thought it was the train in the station, and ran like anything to catch it! But I'm *awfully* hungry, my dear—haven't had a bite for hours."

She quickly got him some supper. And then, after they had shut the door, and pulled down the clematis blind, so that no one could look in, he told her his sad, sad story.

This is what had really happened.

He had been caught in a trap by one of those wicked men who go about the

country stealing poor little birds. He was taken to town, and there they coloured his feathers to make him look like some rare and uncommon bird—hich he certainly did! After that he was put in the bird-shop window. And all this while he had been cooped up in a tiny cage. Oh, it was awful! It made him ill to talk about it.

Before long a little boy, who was out with his mother, saw him and wanted him. So the mother bought Uncle Twitter, telling her little boy that he must look after his bird himself.

He was taken home—but still in the dreadful cage.

He tried to explain to them that he *wasn't* a Rotto-tott-o lundo-rum-car-deer bird—very rare indeed, from the thickest jungle in the centre of Africa—as the man in the shop said; but just a poor little English robin, who had been stolen from his home near the Windflower Wood. And please, oh *please*, would they open the door, and let him out of that terrible cage?

But all they said was, “Just listen how nicely he sings!”

Yet the poor little bird was really crying fit to break his heart.

He had food and water, however, when the little boy didn't forget about it. It wasn't much at the best of times, only in two tiny glasses, one each side of the cage, for water and a little bit of seed. There was never any left over for tomorrow. On the days when the little boy did forget, poor Uncle Twitter nearly died of starvation. And he would sit all of a heap on his tiny perch, hardly able to hold up his head or keep his eyes open. But he could just see the sunset out of the window, from between those horrible cage wires. And his tiny body would shake with sobs; he did so long for the lovely wood and to join in with all the other birds in singing the Evening Song of the Windflower Wood.

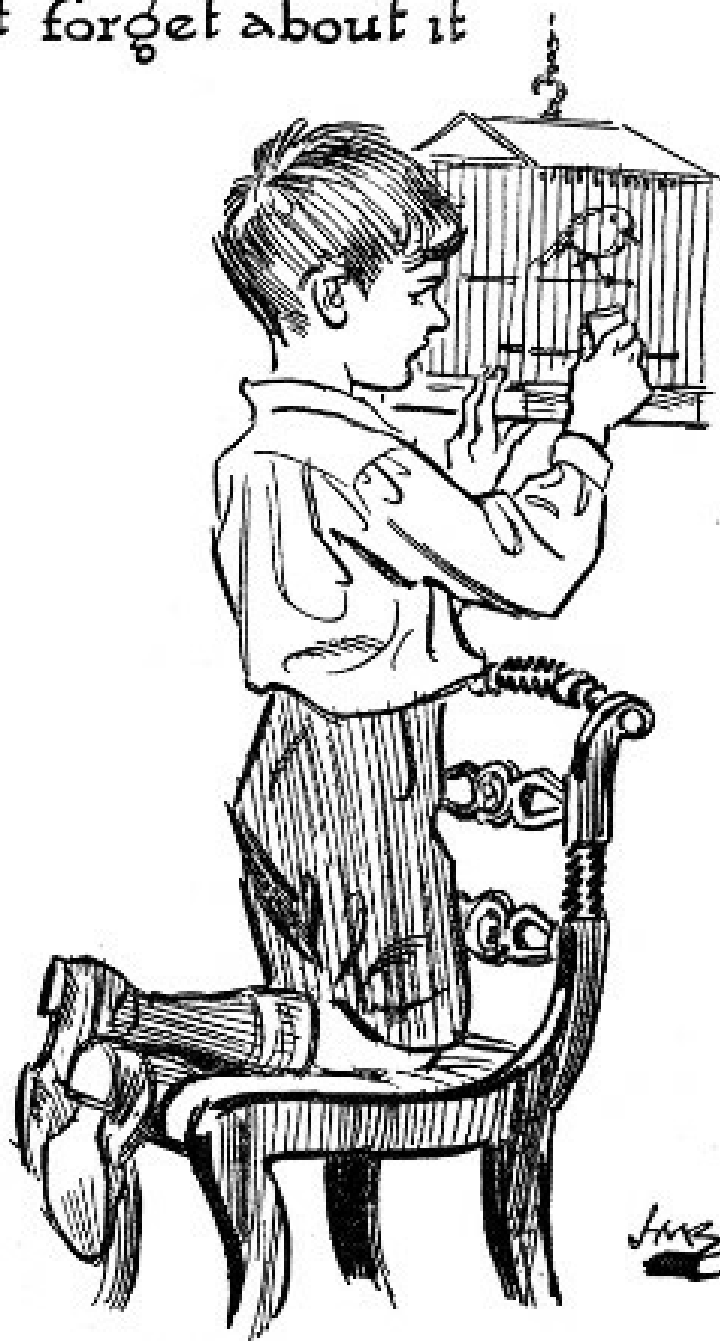
He did once try to sing it to himself. He thought it might make him feel better if he could hear it. But his lovely voice was almost gone, with hunger and his sad life. He could only whisper. And they all said, “The robin is going to sing again, see how happy he is!” when he was nearly dead with misery!

But one day he found the cage door wasn't fastened. He pushed it, and got out. Fortunately the window was open, and away he flew!

Oh the joy of being able to fly again, and stretch his wings, instead of being cramped up in that awful cage!

His troubles weren't quite over, however, for his wings were slightly injured, with beating against those dreadful cage wires, trying to get out. He couldn't fly without pain.

When the little boy  
didn't forget about it



Fortunately he met a swallow whom he knew.

“Hello, Twitter!” he said. “Hurt your wing? Just lean on my shoulder. We’ll soon get you home. But, I say, where did you get that new suit? Quite gay, aren’t you? They dress like that in some of the countries I’ve been visiting, but I didn’t know the fashions had got down here yet!”

“I had to run up to town on business,” said Twitter, not wishing him to know he had been in a cage. Birds consider it such a disgrace to be caught. They call it being in prison. “And I thought I would get a new rig-out. Not that I mind old togs myself, rather like them, in fact; comfortable you know, and all that sort of thing. But the wife said I was getting so shabby she was ashamed to go out with me. My tailor said this was the very latest style. Rather neat, don’t you think?”

The swallow said all the polite things necessary. And in this way Twitter got back home.

Of course Auntie Twitter was overjoyed to see him safe and sound. But she did wonder whatever the neighbours would say about his strange appearance.

“You leave all that to me,” her husband said. “I’m a travelled gentleman now, and shall know exactly how to deal with them. So don’t have any anxiety on that score——”

“And, perhaps, if I put a little extra soda in the tub next washing day,” she said hopefully, “you might try a bath, and see if some of it would come off.”

“What! and be hung out on that wretched spider’s web to dry? Not a bit of it!” He was feeling much more courageous, and so very, very glad, now that he was safely at home again, and after his good supper! “You’ve got a distinguished and most remarkable husband now. Don’t you dream of putting him into the bath overnight to soak, or there will be trouble in this happy home, my dearest.”

So she didn’t.

## CHAPTER VII EVERYBODY EXPLAINS

Next morning the Twitters set off first thing to tell Mr. and Mrs. Robin the good news. And you can understand the commotion it made when all the colours of the rainbow suddenly appeared in their midst.

“Good gracious, Twitter, is that *you?*” said Mr. Robin. “Where in this whole universe did you find that box of paints you’ve got on your back? and where have you been hiding?”

So of course he went over it all again, and told them not the true story he told Auntie Twitter, but the story that he told the swallow, with more added to it to make it sound grander. And he puffed himself out while he told it, too, and did his best to look as accustomed to travelling as the swallows and wild geese, who go away every year to a warmer climate.

Naturally, the robins had to think of something important to tell him, in return for all he had told them, and so they mentioned the fact that the Lady-with-the-Crumbs had come again, and they described the lovely meals that could now be got merely by hopping about on her bird tables.

You may remember that Uncle Twitter had disappeared before the Lady-with-the-Crumbs arrived; so it was news to him to hear that she was at the Flower-Patch House. They thought he would be very excited about it; but he pretended he wasn’t.

“It’s all very well to talk so much about the Lady-with-the-Crumbs,” he said in a lordly, I-know-everything way. “But, ‘smatter of fact, you country people don’t know what a decent meal is, having to scratch around and peck about as you do for every morsel of food! It positively makes me laugh; or it would do, if I wasn’t so sorry for you!”

“But, Uncle, how can we get our dinner if we don’t get it?” Bobbie asked.

“In town they bring it to you,” his uncle explained majestically. “You don’t even have to ask for it. It comes! A sort of footman brings it, and puts it in a crystal bowl all ready beside you.” (Uncle had seen the glasses in the town shops marked “Beautiful Crystal.”)

“A crystal bowl!” the family repeated. “Just think of that now!” And they gasped with wonder.

“But, Uncle, what is a crystal bowl?”

“It’s the thing they put the food in, of course. There are two; one each side of the ca—I mean, the flat in which I resided.” (He was thankful he remembered in time not to say cage! What *would* they have thought of him?)

“One crystal bowl held a most choice selection of eatables—I mean viands; the other contained pure water—er—that is to say, it was supposed to be pure when it was put there; but you understand bathing does sometimes discolour it a trifle, and I never miss my bath, as you know. Altogether it was a life of luxury that I lived in town. Why, they almost fed one with a spoon!”

“Mother, what is a spoon?”

Uncle Twitter kindly explained. He told Bobbie that people are not like birds, whose beaks can do everything they need. People are so helpless that they have actually to be provided with a separate tool for anything they want to do! Just think of it! They have a knife and fork to divide their food; a spoon to get it into their mouths; a pair of scissors if they want to cut something; a comb to do their hair; a tool to crack their nuts; more tools to build their houses—and so on. And all because they haven’t beaks, poor things!

“But, Mother, they’ve got noses. Aren’t they beaks?” Bobbie inquired.

“Don’t ask such ridiculous questions,” said Mrs. Robin:

“Have you ever seen a boy brush his clothes  
With his nose?  
Or ever seen a girl take her tea  
With her toes?  
Of course it’s quite absurd!  
Yet any little bird  
Could do all this quite easily  
And never say a word!”

“Quite so! *Quite* so!” said a voice above, in the oak tree. “And a very bright family too. *Wonderfully* talented.”

Everyone looked up, to see who was interrupting the conversation, though they knew quite well it was the saucy squirrel. But before anyone could think of something suitable to answer back—very polite of course, but explaining clearly and precisely what they thought of him—he started to sing at the top of his voice, only in a mocking imitation of Mrs. Robin:

“Have you ever seen a boy comb his hair  
With his tail?  
Or climb the tallest tree with his little  
Finger nail?  
Have you ever seen a girl wear her bed-clothes  
All the day?  
Or run along the tree-tops when she wants  
A little play?  
Of course it’s quite absurd!  
Yet I’m certain I have heard  
Of a squirrel that just uses  
His tail for what he chooses!  
At night it keeps him warm in bed  
Curled gracefully above his head.  
It’s also handy as a brush.

And when that squirrel has to rush  
Right up the very tip-top-tree  
He holds on by his blanket! See?  
Who is he? Why he's Me! Me! ME!

“And now, ladies and gentlemen, after that beautiful poetry, I'll wish you good afternoon——” And as he skipped away from branch to branch he called out, in a voice that imitated Bobbie, “Mother! I've lost my lov-erly tail! And it was my best Sunday tail, too! Oh, why ever didn't you sew it on stronger?”

“I can't think why you don't move,” said Uncle Twitter. “This neighbourhood has gone down terribly since I went on my travels. Now in London that vulgar creature would not be tolerated for a moment, except in the Zoo; where, of course, they are a very mixed lot. Where I stayed not a squirrel was to be seen.”

“If I had my way,” said Mr. Robin, “they wouldn't be seen here!”

“But what can you expect in such an uncivilized place as this!” Uncle Twitter went on. “Just look at the furniture! Did anyone ever see such ridiculous, old-fashioned, uncomfortable perches as these twigs and branches you use here—all rough and knobby and uneven? Why in the beautiful flat they placed at my disposal in town the perches were quite round and smooth and polished, not a twig, or thorn, or leaf on them anywhere. I had three in my flat, two downstairs and one higher up.”

“I shouldn't care to have only three,” said Mr. Robin, who was beginning to be a little jealous as he listened to Uncle Twitter's description of the grandeurs. “I like a fresh one every day to sharpen my beak upon. Not the same dirty old perches.”

“But they weren't dirty. They were taken out and cleaned——sometimes. Did you ever find anyone taking down our branches here, and cleaning them, and putting them back again on the trees all nice and tidy? Ah! Town life is wonderful,” he said.

“But, Uncle, why did you come back and leave such a lovely place——?”

“I expect they got sick of him, and turned him out,” said a cheeky voice up above. And a beech nut descended on Uncle Twitter's nose!

At that moment there was a sound of a window being opened in the Flower-Patch House. Instantly every bird flew up to the house, for this was the sign that the crumbs and other delicacies were being put out for them. No one bothered about the grandeurs of town, or gave another thought to Uncle Twitter's new suit.

The squirrel went scampering over the trees, calling to his sister: “Hurry up, Flossie! she's putting out the nuts.”

And in less time than it takes to write about it scores of birds of all sizes, from pheasants down to tiny cole tits and gold-crested wrens, were flocking to



the window ledges and bird tables and lawns, where the Lady-with-the-Crumbs had spread the most delicious meals—of rolled oats, canary-seed, hemp-seed, suet, oats, cake and biscuit crumbs, wheat, maize, raisins and currants; with nuts and cheese in the food boxes fixed to the squirrels' breakfast-tree.

Such a banquet! And as though that wasn't enough, one robin came and perched on the Lady's shoulder, and then ate out of her hand.

Everybody seemed pleased except the yellow-hammer. He always was annoyed because the squirrels gobbled the cheese before he could get it—and to this day you can hear him airing his grievance, because all he could get was “a little, little, little bit of bread and no che-e-e-se!”

#### A ROWDY RHYME

When we're having a game—  
It is always the same—  
We make a consider'ble noise!  
But, you see, it's the way  
We enjoy all our play,  
So long as we're girls and boys.

We cannot keep still,—  
Though you say what you will,—  
Our toes are all twists and twirls.  
We jump and we dance,  
If you give us the chance,  
So long as we're boys and girls.

For what we like best  
Is *not* a nice rest,  
But making a beautiful noise!  
We do love a riot,  
And hate to be quiet,  
So long as we're girls and boys.

So long as we're girls and boys  
Of course we can play with our toys,  
But what we prefer  
Is to make a great stir,  
And a floor-shaking, earthquaking NOISE!

## CHAPTER VIII

### BOBBIE DECIDES TO TRAVEL TOO

The robins were playing Hide and Seek, a game they are very fond of; but they don't play it quite as we do. Instead of hiding in some out-of-the-way spot, they wait till they see the gardener at work sweeping the paths. Then they simply drop down from a branch, among the red and brown leaves that have blown off the trees. And so exactly do they match the leaves, and the red and russet apples that are rolling about the orchard and the paths, that it is exceedingly difficult to detect them, unless you are very used to robins—any number of them.

They seem to enjoy it hugely when the gardener gets taken in, and finds he is sweeping up a bright-eyed little bird when he thought it was a red leaf from the pear tree. A robin will wait silently, and keep still, until the broom nearly swishes against him. Then up he flies into a bush or tree and whistles out to all the others in the garden:

“I've done the gardener again; took him in completely! That's another game to me.”

While the other robins answer back that they don't believe he played fair. And they all start to argue about it.

Robin No. 1 says he will fight anyone who dares to say it isn't his game. And he'll show them exactly how he did it.

Silence in Birdland for a minute. They all watch him carefully.

Down drops a little brownish red streak from the trees again. The gardener, if he is thinking about other things, merely concludes it is another autumn leaf, and he goes on sweep, sweep, sweeping.

His broom seems to move to a tune, as though it were singing:

Brown leaves,  
Red leaves,  
Yellow, green, and gold,  
Whirling leaves,  
Curling leaves—  
That robin's very bold!

“Hello!” says the gardener, “there's that bird again! He'll find himself in the bonfire one of these days, if he isn't careful!”

But robin knows better! And by this time he is carolling away at the very top of the syringa bush, and inquiring if anyone now doubts whether he won? And if so—will they kindly speak out plainly, and he will soon explain?

But if by any chance you do notice the little ball of feathers among the

leaves, and you say to him: “You rascal! I see you! What are you doing down there?” he looks up with a most innocent expression. “Me?” he seems to say. “Were you speaking to *me*? I’m only hunting for my dinner. Look! Here’s a lovely worm——” and he brandishes it in the air for you to see.

But all the other birds laugh aloud, because, according to the rules of their game, he has *lost* this time, and the game counts one to them.

Bobbie was very good at this game, he usually had the highest score. In fact, he was smart at most things—when he liked. But he didn’t always like, that was the trouble.

“There’s that bird again!”



He was playing with the other young robins in the Flower-Patch one day after Uncle Twitter had told them about his wonderful travels—and he won every game. But just as he was in the middle of a very exciting sweep-up he heard his mother calling him. Dreadfully annoying, of course, when he was at the most exciting part of the game, and wanted to win it badly in order to prove himself the Champion of the Wood.

But young birds are obedient, and though he did not look over-amiably, he went to his mother at once. She was on one of the window ledges busily collecting food for the family supper.

“I want you to take some of these lovely cake crumbs down to baby,” she said. “Then come straight back and help me carry home the supper.”

Now if there was one thing Bobbie hated doing, it was carrying home the provisions. And especially did it annoy him to have to spend valuable time feeding the baby, when he might have been the Champion of the Wood by then! He met some of the other robins as he was going home sulkily with the baby’s supper, and they called after him, mockingly:

“Hello, Nursie, are you going to give baby its bottle?”

It was silly of him to take notice of course; because they were only jealous that he was nearly the Champion. But he was in such a cross mood at the minute that he didn’t stop to think. He merely pitched the food into the nest, right over the poor baby’s head, and then he flew out of the wood, across the river, and half-way up the opposite hill. Here he paused for breath.

But his mind was quite made up. He was thoroughly sick of this place. He would go right away to that wonderful town Uncle Twitter had told them about, where no one had to take food to the baby, or help to carry it home for suppers. But a footman brought delicious everythings in crystal bowls. It seemed a lovely idea—nothing to do but eat all the—what was it Uncle called them?—viands! Yes! that was the word—viands.

He didn’t know what viands were, but they sounded most aristocratic and tasty. And that was the sort of meal he liked.

The very thought of it was so delightful that he wouldn’t rest another minute on the tree, but set off to find the town. He hadn’t the least idea where it was. Being only young, he didn’t know anything about the world outside the Windflower Wood and the Flower-Patch. He thought there would be only one way to go, and that way would be sure to lead to the town! So he flew on and on and on.

Foolishly, he never thought to notice the way he was going. He never once looked back (as one ought to do, so as to know the way if one has to return). He just rushed on and on and on some more!

And still no town was in sight.

Sometimes he stopped to take a drink at a brook: but he wouldn’t wait to find anything to eat. He was so anxious to get to those lovely viands in crystal bowls.

At last it began to get dark; and he was feeling very tired. Also, everything seemed very strange, with no one he knew to speak to.

He tried to think he wasn’t really afraid. He told himself he was a brave explorer—going a long journey, thousands of miles long—such as he had

heard the swallows describe.

But, all the same, he felt very lonely and little; and he did wish he knew the way back to the nest. Just for the night, of course. He didn't want to stay there. But it would be so very nice to have his father beside him now that it was getting dark.

He didn't sleep in the nest, at home, now that he was growing up. The younger ones slept there, with Mother to take care of them, while he and Father slept in such a cosy place among some very thick ivy that grew against the wall at the corner of a barn. The cold wind never touched them there, and the thick overhanging ivy kept the rain off them, and sheltered them like ever so many umbrellas.

Father had shown him this lovely place the first night after he came out of the nest. And he had slept there with Father to take care of him every night since.

Birds usually go to the same sleeping place every night—but it isn't easy to find them! You have to watch very carefully to discover where they go, and if they see you watching they will fly off in another direction, and pretend they are going to sleep somewhere else. They will wait and wait, till they see you go away—and then, with one quick dart, they slip into their usual corner, and hide themselves so cleverly that it would be most difficult to find them.

The parents teach the little ones how to do this. And the youngsters soon learn to be as quick at hiding themselves as their elders are.

You can understand, therefore, how miserably lost and lonely poor Bobbie felt when it got dark and he didn't know where to look for his usual sleeping corner. Neither could he hear his father fluffing out his feathers beside him, or his mother settling the children for the night, in the nest just a little way off.

He decided he had better creep into some ivy that was climbing up a tree near by. He flew over to it, and began to look for a secluded spot, where he would be out of the wind (birds don't like wind as a rule), when suddenly a large white head poked itself out of the ivy close beside him, and a big owl said in a loud voice:

“Who—who—who—who—*are* you? Who—who—*who*—who—*are* you?” And it looked so fierce!

He was terrified. His mother had told him to be very careful and never go too near Mr. Owl in their wood because owls liked small birds for their supper. Yet here he was walking right into the owl's mouth, almost!

"Who-who-who-who-  
are you?"



He tumbled off the tree, in his haste to get away, and landed on a lower branch. But that was still too near his enemy. Yet, if he went to another tree there might be another owl there. He *was* frightened.

Fortunately, the big white owl took no more notice of him, but flew away in search of his friends. At last little Bobbie put his head under his wing and went to sleep. Though he soon woke up again, for a storm had come on, and he was dripping wet, and cold with the wind. How he did long for his snug sleeping corner at home.

Morning came at last. He was thankful to see the sun. Being very hungry, he realized that he must search for his own breakfast now, as there was no mother or father to get it for him. This wasn't quite as pleasant as going to the Flower-Patch House and finding lovely cake crumbs and all sorts of tit-bits on the window ledges and bird tables. But he consoled himself with the thought that, when he got to town, he would have wonderful meals brought to him by footmen. *Then* he would enjoy himself!

That reminded him that he had better be getting along, as there was no sign of the town yet! He wished he knew which was the right way. There seemed such a lot of different ways when he began to look around.

A pigeon chanced to be passing by—great travellers some pigeons are, and very obliging, friendly birds. The pigeons are really the A.A. men of the bird world (you know, the polite men in uniform who look after people in cars, who are travelling along the roads). They tell other birds the way.

Bobbie asked the pigeon to direct him to the town. The pigeon kindly told him which turnings to take, and about midday he arrived there.

But he *was* surprised! Never had he seen such a strange place. No fields of grass, no nice haystacks to play around. No trees! He wondered where he ought to go?



He waited on a lamp-post (it was the nearest thing to a tree he could find), hoping someone would come along with the crystal bowls of dinner, and take him to a lovely flat, such as Uncle Twitter had described. But no one seemed to bother about him. He just sat there, wondering what to do next, when some unkind boys came along. One shouted out:

“Look! There’s a robin! Let’s see if we can get him.”

And they tried to climb up the lamp-post.

Bobbie was so frightened, because one was throwing stones at him, and they were all making a great noise, he flew away in terror, anywhere—he didn’t know

where—just to get away from them, and in his plight he banged his head against something he hadn't seen in his fright, and fell, stunned and senseless.

"Look!  
There's a robin!"





## CHAPTER IX

### BUSHY TAIL MAKES HIMSELF USEFUL

Up above the fields adjoining the Windflower Wood the lark was singing at the top of his voice. This was his song:

“Green and brown go well together,  
In the fields this sunny weather.  
Green is the grass, but brown is my nest;  
So brown is the colour I love the best.

Brown and gold is the autumn wood;  
Reddy brown apples are very good.  
The sky is blue, but brown is my nest;  
So brown is the colour I love the best.”

“Can’t someone tell that rowdy creature up there to move on into the next street, instead of disturbing the whole neighbourhood like this?” inquired the bullfinch, bulging out his chest, indignantly. “Why, I can’t hear myself speak!” (which wasn’t surprising, for the bullfinch has a very small voice). “Besides,” he went on, “what he says is perfectly ridiculous, since everybody knows that red and black and grey are the only colours a refined and really aristocratic gentleman would deign to notice. If he had said that a crimson waistcoat and a black velvet cap——”

But no one heard the rest of his wise remarks, for the lark sang louder than ever.

“Around my house are buttercups yellow,  
And a tall moon daisy—a splendid fellow—  
Stands at the door.  
While over the floor  
The speedwell has laid down a carpet of blue—  
A lovely hue  
When the sun shines through.  
And the clover is pink. But brown is my nest;  
So brown is the colour I love the best.”

“And quite right too,” said the squirrel. “In fact, why take notice of any other colour? *I* am brown, and nuts are brown. That settles it, what more can anyone need?”

“Why, black and orange, of course,” replied the blackbird, who had a beautiful orange bill. “And what about the grey squirrels in Regent’s Park? Relations of yours, aren’t they?”

“Only *very* distant,” replied the squirrel. “Some foreign connections, I fancy. But we don’t visit them. And we hope they won’t call on us, for our

families have never got on well together.”

“And serve you right, too,” said the jay. “You need taking down a peg or two. You are far too top-loftical!”

“Oh, *do* be kind everybody. *Do* be kind everybody, *do!*” said the wood-pigeon, who is always anxious for peace and pleasantness, and hates to hear any quarrelling. Then, as a bright idea occurred to him, he said, “Do sing us a song, squirrel dear, *do* sing us a song, now *do!*”

The squirrel had meant to say something cheeky to the jay. But he was very pleased to be invited to sing. For as a rule the birds told him his voice was like the lawnmower when it needs oiling! So he started off at once without waiting to settle accounts with Mr. Jay. And this was what he sang:

“Jack and Jill went up the hill  
To fetch a pail of milk;  
Jack was dressed in his Sunday best,  
And Jill was all in silk.

They tied the pail to Brindle’s tail,  
And clambered on her back;  
Which made her jump and sadly bump  
Miss Jill and Master Jack.

She leapt so high they knocked the sky,  
And bashed into a star;  
It blinked its eyes in mild surprise,  
And said, ‘How rude you are!’

The milk upset, they all got wet,  
The clouds, indeed, were soaking:  
The sky-blue ground was nearly drowned,  
And gurgled, ‘Most provoking!’

The stars all rushed and banged and brushed,  
And scoured for half a day;  
The planets rubbed, the comets scrubbed,  
To clear the Milky Way.

The cow, meanwhile, had ceased to smile,  
She was too much incensed,  
When, turning round, she duly found  
The milk was not condensed!

She tossed her tail and crumped the pail,  
The moon-man beamed with laughter,  
For Jack fell down and broke his crown,  
And Jill came tumbling after!”



And clambered on her back

By now every bird had decided to start singing the very moment the squirrel left off, to show him how much better they could do it—that is to say, if he ever did leave off! He seemed to be going on for ever! But, at that moment, Mrs. Robin suddenly flew down to them and said very anxiously:

“I can’t find Bobbie. Do any of you know where he is?”

Then all the young birds—the little robins and tits and chaffinches—who had been playing the hide-and-seek game with him in the garden, started to answer her, and they all talked at once; so that no one could really hear what anybody was saying, for it sounded like this:

“Yes M’ssrobin, I know—I’ll tell you all about it—he said—I said—No—Yes, it isn’t—said he’d find the way—I said—no he didn’t—get lovely things to eat—I tell you he did, I heard him—coloured coat like Uncle Twitter’s—No, it was like this—I’ll tell you M’ssrobin—coming back to fetch us all—it was what he said—No it isn’t—said he wanted to be the king of the castle—in a crystal bowl—with clean perches—I said—no you aren’t right—yes I am—said he’d punch my head if I didn’t call him king—he did M’ssrobin—I saw him go—he said—I said——”

By this time poor Mrs. Robin’s head was whirling at such a pace she wondered if she was a sewing machine! She couldn’t make sense of any of it. So she went off to tell Mr. Robin that something dreadful had evidently

happened to poor dear Bobbie, and she believed those tiresome tits had punched the dear boy's head.

The squirrel had been listening to all the talk, however; and he knew more than any of them. For he had been up in the beech tree when Bobbie was with some of his friends in the wood, and swanking at a great rate—as he was very fond of doing.

The squirrel remembered that he had been boasting to the others of a great plan he had, in his head. He meant to find out that wonderful town Uncle Twitter had told them about. Then he would come back—wearing a grand coat, only much grander even than his uncle's. He would be the leader of a big Gang, like the swallows when they set off on their travels. And he would take them all to the town, and they would have those lovely things to eat, out of crystal bowls. And they would all have to bow to him and salute him.

But a young tit had said *he* would be the king; he was the best-looking. And a young black-cap said *he* ought to be king because he had the best voice. Very soon everybody was wanting to be the king, and Bobbie was threatening to punch their heads. Only at that moment his mother had called him to mind the baby while she went out; or goodness knows how many smashed noses there would have been!

As Bushy Tail sat thinking about this, Flossie came up, and he said to her: "That young idiot has evidently gone off to find the town. And a nice silly he'll look when he gets there and discovers there's nothing to eat! Uncle Twitter ought to be ashamed of himself, telling such a string of tarri-diddles! Just as though I don't know where he'd been! Prison, of course!"

"But what can we do?" asked Flossie.

"I shall have to consider a bit," her brother replied, for he was really a very kind-hearted squirrel, and ever so sorry for Mrs. Robin, even if he was a trifle saucy at times.

"I know," he said suddenly. "If only the Lady-with-the-Crumbs goes into town with the car I'll jump on behind, and keep my eyes open, to see if he's anywhere on the road."

"Can't I go too?" Flossie asked.

"No. It wouldn't be suitable for Flossies," he said grandly. "Only for *me!*"

"Well, when is she going in the car?"

"I'll have to find out." And with that he dashed up to the house—and squirrels almost fly through the air when they are in a hurry, they go so quickly.

He got on to the window ledge outside the Lady's own room, and went on cracking nuts, and peeling off the brown inside skin. Squirrels are very particular and won't eat this. They throw it away as they nibble it off; and you will usually see several tits hovering around the squirrel at such a time, picking

up the little morsels he is tossing down to the ground.

But though our little friend listened, and watched, he saw no sign of the car.

Then the Gentleman came into the room, and said to the Lady, “Are you going out in the car to-day?”

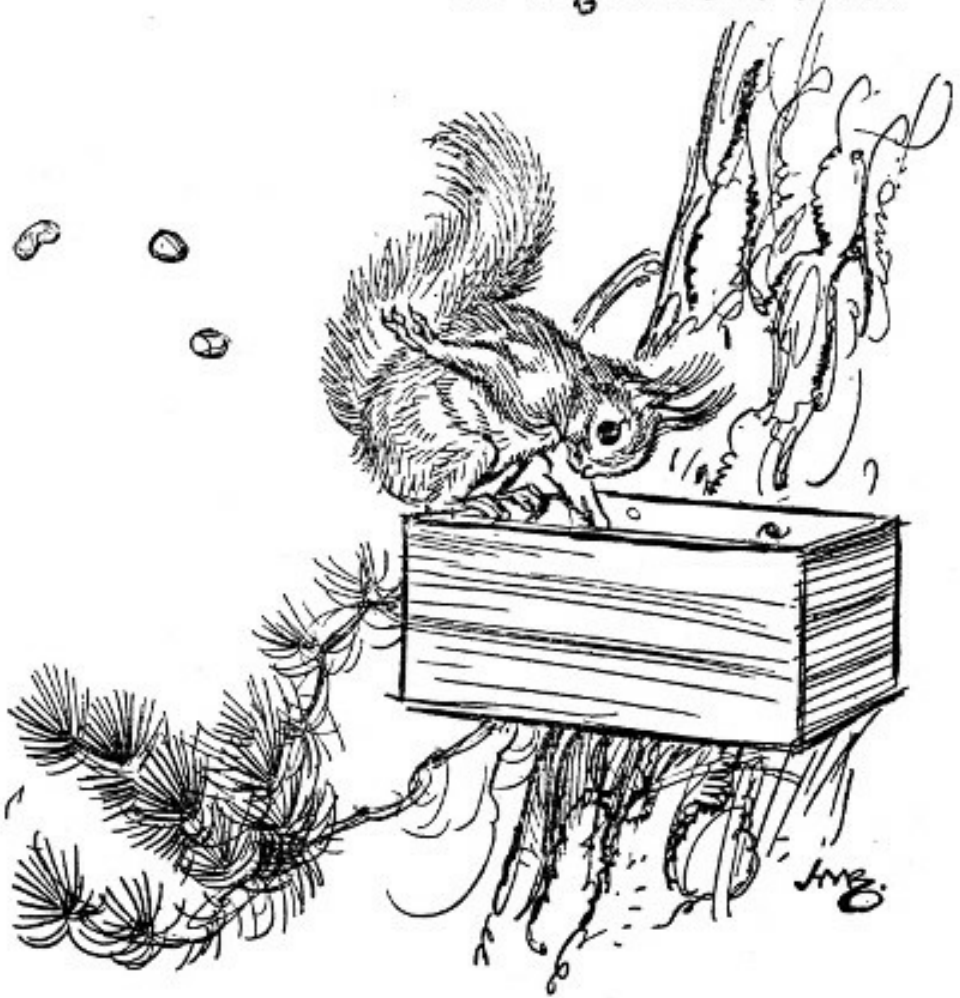
“No,” she said, “I don’t think so—not unless the squirrels need some more nuts. I must go and look at their boxes, and if they are getting low, I shall have to go into town and get some more, for I’m quite out of nuts.”

“Oh!” said Bushy Tail to himself. “If that is the case, I can soon settle the car question.” And he scampered down to what is known as the Squirrels’ Breakfast Tree—a big Scots pine, with wooden boxes fastened to the trunk, which are kept full of nuts.

Bushy Tail started on the first box he came to. Seizing the nuts with his front paws, he flung them out in all directions. Then he rushed to the next box, and cleared out the whole of its contents, pitching the nuts to right and left, and sending them as far afield as he could. In this way he had soon emptied the lot!

Then he went to an upper branch and waited quietly. Before long the Lady-with-the-Crumbs came to examine them.

## Pitching the nuts to right and left.



“Why, the poor little squirrels haven’t a solitary nut!” she said sympathetically. “They will be starved if I don’t get them some more at once. To think I should have left them without a single one. I *am* so sorry!”

And away she went, to order the car to take her to the Nut Shop in town, while Bushy Tail went away, chuckling, to tell Flossie of his success.

“And now I must be off,” he said. “Don’t let Mother worry if I’m not back till late. I don’t know how long I shall be—I may have a hunt around the town

for him, if I don't see him on the road.”

And he skipped off again, intending to go straight up to the house, and expecting to see the car waiting at the front door. But he stopped to have another little argument with the jay, and, to his dismay, by the time he reached the house he saw the car rolling away in the far, far distance, along the road.

It had gone without him after all! He was so disappointed he hadn't the heart to go back and tell Flossie. But as he happened to see his particular enemy again, the jay, eating some of the nuts he had thrown out, he rushed after him, and drove him away. Then he collected the nuts in his cheek pockets, as many as he could carry, and carried them home as a present to Flossie.

He was really a very kind little squirrel. And ever so sorry that he hadn't been able to help Mrs. Robin after all.

“And I expect that cock-eyed dog is sitting up in that car along with the Lady, and fancying himself no end!” he said to Flossie. “It *do* seem hard!” speaking ungrammatically because his mouth was full of nuts.

“Yes, it *do*,” said Flossie, as her mouth was full too. “It was all I could do to break it with all my teeth”—as she cracked a nut and offered him half.

But he wasn't meaning nuts!

And, as it happened, the little white dog with the brown ears had been left at home—as you will discover later on.

## CHAPTER X

### THE KING COMES BACK!

It was a good thing that when Bobbie fell senseless it was on the roof of a house. He had struck his head against a chimney-pot in his flight from the boys, being too terrified to notice where he was going. Before long, however, he recovered; though, when he first opened his eyes, he could not think where he was. But gradually he remembered all about it; and he looked around most cautiously, to make quite sure those dreadful boys were not waiting for him.

Finding the coast quite clear, he got up at last, shook out his feathers, and was surprised to see how dirty they were already—quite sooty in places. Towns have so much smoke, it makes the birds, and even the green leaves and flowers, rather dingy and grubby. His mother would have been shocked if she could have seen him, because in the Windflower Wood all the little wild things are ever so clean. Not a speck of dust or soot is ever on their feathers or their fur. It is such a beautifully clean place; and in addition there is the clear brook, with all sorts of little waterfalls, always at hand for a bath.

There are very shallow places, with stones to stand upon, for the littlest birds; and deep pools for those with longer legs. While the big birds, like the jays and thrushes and rooks, stand under some little waterfall and get a lovely shower-bath. And everybody loves to splash and send the water up in the air and all over themselves on hot summer days.

Mrs. Robin was most careful to see that the children had their baths regularly. As soon as they were able to leave the nest she showed them how to stand on a stone in a shallow pool, and then jump in and splash about for a few minutes. Then she fetched them out, showed them how to shake the water off their backs, and took them up to a branch in the sunshine, and taught them to comb out every wet feather with their beaks.

A most particular lady was Mrs. Robin!

But I'm afraid Bobbie wasn't so particular. In fact, he felt rather glad that he needn't go and wash his claws the moment they got dirty. Of course he expected to have to keep on being clean when he was living in the wonderful flat Uncle talked about—that reminded him: Where was that flat? And what had become of the footmen who were to bring those lovely things to eat? He was getting very hungry.

Perhaps the footmen didn't know he had arrived. He thought that if he sang a little bit they would hear him, and hurry out with the viands. So he tried what



he could do in the musical line. But his voice hadn't properly developed yet; he could only make a small sort of "whisper song." And though he tried his hardest, it only brought a sparrow, who came and squawked at him, and asked him who he was, and why he was presuming to stand on his—the sparrow's—roof!

Bobbie told him he was a robin, and he lived in the Windflower Wood.

"Never heard of the place," said the sparrow. "And, in any case, I know you're not a robin, whatever you are. And I don't like the look of you. A robin has a red breast and always stands on a holly branch in the snow. I know, because there's a picture of one in a shop window down the street. And *you* have a brown speckled breast. Call yourself a robin, indeed!"

Now it is a fact that young robins are brown and speckled. They don't get a red breast while they are young. The crimson feathers come later, when they are nearly grown up. So poor Bobbie was in a fix—because he hadn't any sign of red on him as yet.

However, he didn't stop to explain things. He was so hungry he asked the sparrow if he could give him something to eat.

But the sparrow merely asked if he hadn't read the notice on the gate, which said:

"No Beggars. No Hawkers. No Circulars."

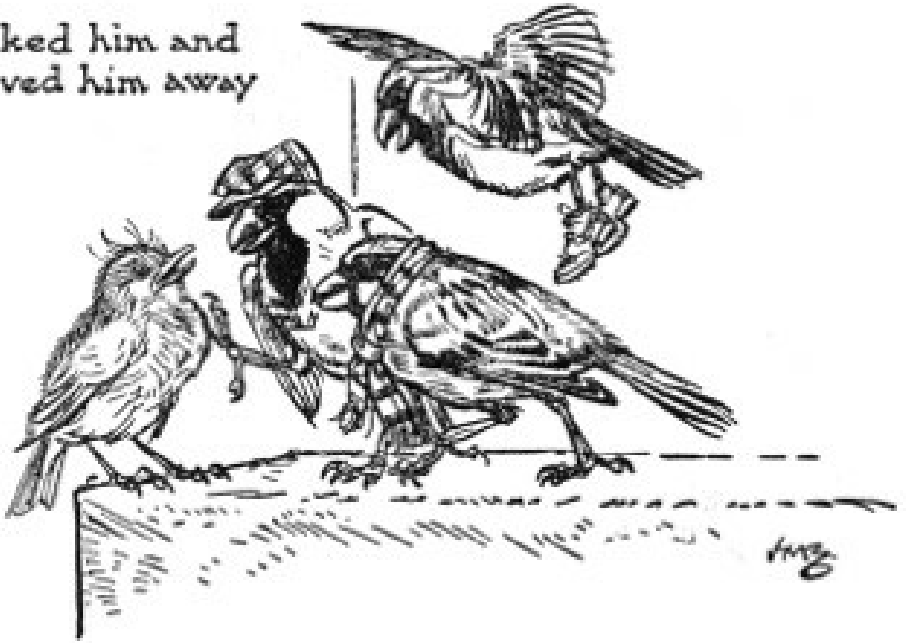
Bobbie apologized for not having seen it, but explained that he hadn't come in by the gate.

"Oh! Then you'll jolly well go out by it!" And the horrid little sparrow just tipped him over the edge of the roof. Down he tumbled into an aspidistra, which had been put to air on the front door-step. Up jumped a dog who had evidently been taking care of the aspidistra, and up jumped a cat who had evidently been taking care of the dog. And I can assure you up jumped poor Bobbie as quickly as he knew how—and out of the gate he flew, without stopping to read the notice about Beggars and Hawkers and Circulars.

On and on he went, hoping to find a tree somewhere, because he felt safer in a tree than anywhere else. But the farther he went the thicker became the houses, and the more boys there seemed to be in the streets, and cats and dogs. But no trees! It was quite bewildering.

He had to stop at last. He was so weak and tired for want of food. He had a dreadfully hollow place inside him, where his dinner ought to have been, but wasn't. He had never had an empty part of him like that before. It gave him such a strange, miserable, helpless kind of feeling. Oh, if only he could see some crumbs!

Pecked him and  
shoved him away



At that moment a kind little girl opened a window of a house near by and put some crumbs out on the ledge.

He flew straight over to them, so thankful to see a little food. But, before he could get a single mouthful, he was set upon by a dozen angry sparrows, who pecked him and shoved him away, and asked him what he meant by coming and stealing *their* crumbs! Finally they drove him right away, and quickly gobbled up every atom themselves.

By this time he was actually crying. But he dared not stay there, because they threatened to kill him if he didn't move off pretty quickly.

Up he went again!



So he flew on and on again, wondering if he would ever find his way home. Only by now he was so weak his wings began to fail him. He hadn't strength to move them very fast. He was getting dizzy, and was afraid he would fall. So he landed on a roof of another house, intending to rest there for a few moments. But, to his horror, he saw a cat stalking over the slates, and fixing its gleaming eyes hungrily upon him.

Up he went again! Poor little Bobbie! There didn't seem a safe spot left in all the town where he could rest in peace for a few minutes.

Yet—he could *not* go on much farther. His strength was going. Down he came on yet another roof—a shop this time. He looked about, but fortunately there was no sign of a cat, and no sparrow came to bully him.

He found a comfortable corner between some chimneys, and thought if he could get a little rest and a sleep he might feel better. He was settling his head under his wing, when he heard a strange noise in the chimney.

He looked up to see whatever it could be, and behold! a big, black, bristling sweep's brush came out of the top of the chimney—evidently somebody was having their chimney swept—and sent a smother of soot all

over the roof, Bobbie included.

You should have seen him! Black from head to toe!

But he was too tired now to mind about anything. He was so weak that he had ceased to care whether he was black or brown. All he wanted was something to eat. He managed to find a little rain-water in the guttering at the edge of the roof. That revived him a little. He crept to the edge and looked over, to see if a crumb was anywhere in the road.

And then he saw a sight that made him tremble all over with excitement. For outside a shop, in the street below, a car was waiting. And he knew that car. It belonged to the Lady-with-the-Crumbs. And there was Henry, the chauffeur. Quite an old friend of his!

Oh, if only he could get down to him! But his poor tired wings wouldn't work properly. And his poor tired head seemed to be going round and round when he attempted to fly. His little wings seemed to be made of lead. Too heavy for him to move.

He stood on the edge of the gutter and tried to jump down. But he only landed on a verandah roof below.

Still, he would try again, and in time he felt sure he would get there.

But before he could reach the car he saw the Lady come out of the shop and get in it. And Henry began to stir things up to make it go.

With a desperate effort poor little Bobbie flung himself into the air, and dropped down like a small withered leaf—a very sooty leaf by the way—right into the back of the car!

(So after all Bushy Tail had really been the means of bringing him home in the car.)

No one saw him fall. But fortunately he fell on a rug, which was soft, otherwise he might have broken his leg.

He lay there exhausted, but happy. He closed his eyes, because he was too tired to keep them open. Presently a sound beside him made him open them and look around. A paper bag had tumbled off the seat and a little cake rolled out, and actually fell close to him.

Oh, how thankful he was! He pecked and pecked away. Gradually the hollow place inside him got filled up. And he himself felt miles better. After a little rest he started to do some more pecking.

And all this while the Lady was driving the car, and had no idea that she was bringing home a little friend, as well as some nuts and cakes!

By the time they reached the Windflower Wood, Bobbie felt so much better that he began to think what a story he would have to tell the Gang of his adventures, and how they would envy him. He was sorry he hadn't a blue and yellow and green coat, like Uncle Twitter had. But still—he had had some adventures! No doubt about that!

When the car stopped he flew out before anyone saw him, and down to the wood he went, prepared to astonish them all.

And so he did. But not in the way he expected.

For when they saw a soot-black bird arrive on the scene they all set up such a laugh that he was quite annoyed: and the more he tried to talk, the more they shrieked with laughter. For he *did* look an object.

Mrs. Robin was in a rare way.

“For mercy sake don’t go near the baby,” she exclaimed. “Where *on earth* have you been to get yourself in such a horrid mess? Go down to the brook *at once* and keep on washing till you’re clean.”

And Mr. Robin said, “Yes, my lad; I advise you to go quickly, too, and do the job thoroughly. And when you come back, *I* want a little conversation with you.”

It was a great day for the Wood! Quite a crowd gathered round to watch him having his bath. And though he kept on telling them he had had a wonderful time, they all went on laughing and saying things all together which sounded like this:

“Our Bobbie likes to have his bath

In crystal bowls of soot.

Ha! Ha!

When he comes out, he makes us shout,

He’s black from head to foot.

Tra la!

His coat, he said, would be bright red,

With blues, and greens, and yellows.

And he would be the Champion King,

And punch our heads like anything

If we were cheeky fellows!

Our Bobbie looks just like a sweep,

Tra la! Tra la! la la!

It very nearly makes us weep!

You see how sad we are!

Ha! Ha!

Oh! *very* sad we are!”

“Now wash behind your ears, my love!”

The saucy squirrel said,

While cracking nuts in the tree above

Poor Bobbie’s sooty head.

“And don’t forget your golden crown—

The one they gave you up in town!

Or spoil your scrumptious, frumpious jacket——”

“Now MOVE ON THERE! What’s all this racket?” And there stood Mr. Policeman Crow! “What’s all this about?” he inquired, majestically, before the

young birds had time to scuttle home to their mothers.

“Please, sir, he’s all black!” said a little blue tit. “And we can’t help laughing at him.” Blue tits really aren’t afraid of anybody—though they are so small.

“Ho! ho! That’s it, is it? Then let me tell you this—if I catch any of you youngsters laughing at black people again I’ll spifflicate every one of you! Black is a *most* important colour——” and he stretched out his wings magnificently, and looked severely at those who remained—though by this time most of them had slipped away as quietly as they could. You see, they had forgotten that *he* was black! And, of course, they didn’t want to be spifflicated!

Aided by a  
tiny piece of the birch tree.



It didn’t take the rest of them long to “Move on there!” And Bobbie was as quick as any of them.

And in ending this pathetic chapter I can only assure you that Bobbie was more than glad to snuggle down among the ivy that night, in the warm corner

by the barn. For he was nice and full inside—even though his father did have a little conversation with him earlier in the evening, aided by a tiny piece of the birch tree!

## CHAPTER XI

### THE LITTLE DOG HAS A SORROW

Now while all these things had been happening to Bobbie, there were also certain happenings at the Flower-Patch House.

In the first place—as you have already heard—the little white dog did not go in the car with the Lady when she went into town.

You see it was like this.

The day before he had had a bilious attack. No one knew why. Cook said she was sure *she* hadn't given him anything to eat. And the housemaid said she was sure *she* hadn't. The gardener said he was sure *he* hadn't. Then everybody said they were sure *they* hadn't either. In fact, to listen to them, you would have thought that the poor dog hadn't had a bite for weeks! Whereas he seemed to be getting almost fat, and not a bit like Bobbie was when he was so weak on the roof.

However, the Lady said he evidently had caught a slight chill. And the Gentleman said it looked to him like a chill. Cook and the gardener and everybody else said they thought he had a chill. So they decided he had better stay at home in the warm.

And the Lady went without him in the car.

Presently the Gentleman put his hat on to go out too, and Mac jumped up joyfully, for he did so enjoy going for a walk with his master. But alas! the Gentleman shook his head and said, "Not to-day, old boy, I think you had better stop in the warm. You seem to have caught a bit of a chill." And so he was left behind.

Ah well!

He wondered what he had better do to pass the time. Then he remembered a friend of his in town—the dog next door—who had been ill. So he thought he would write to him.

This is what he said:

The Flower-Patch House  
Under the kitchen table

Dear Spot,—

I write this little letter,  
To say I hope that you are better.  
I know it's sad  
To feel so bad  
Be-cause  
I was



The day I ate  
All the cat's dinner off her plate.  
The herrings made me awf'ly ill,  
Though people say I have a chill!  
And now, dear friend,  
I'll have to end  
This hurried scribble.  
There's not a dribble  
Of ink left in Cook's pot.  
The weather is so hot.  
Some day I'm coming back.  
Till then—

Your old friend, Mac.

While he was writing he heard sounds upstairs. He listened! In the Lady's bedroom! Yes—burglars of course! And they would be stealing all her valuable things, like biscuits and chocolates and beef-bones. He decided to investigate *at once*, and save what he could from the burglars' clutches. Someone must do something.

Now it was a rule that he must not go upstairs. "Anywhere downstairs," his mistress used to say; "but not upstairs, Mac dear. Bedrooms are not for little dogs." So of course he always obeyed her.

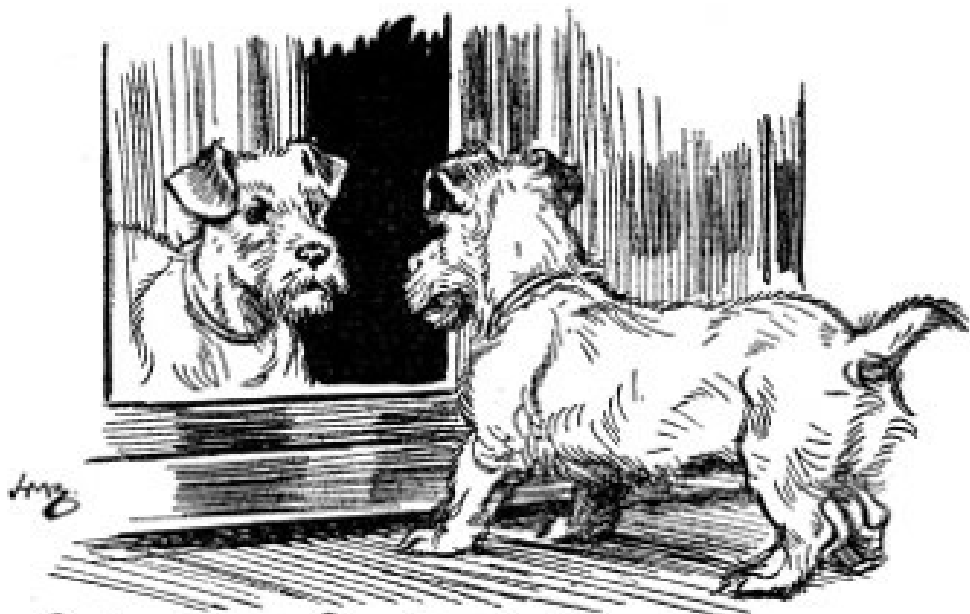
But to-day he was sure she would wish him to go upstairs in order to protect her property, and everyone else in the house. His master was out, and at that moment *he* was the only man in the house (excepting the burglar, of course), therefore he was in charge and must act! And upstairs he went—quietly, in order to surprise the burglar. (He had often wanted to catch one!)

He pushed open the door of the Lady's bedroom very softly. But, to his disgust, it was only Tom Tompkins, one of the builder's men, who was mending a broken sash-line!

He didn't want the man to know how he had been taken in; therefore, he strolled around the room as though he were looking for something important, like his ball, or his indiarubber cat that had only half a head now and two legs instead of four.

He had never been in the room before, so he was really interested in everything there. It was while he was examining the furniture that he came upon something that gave him a terrible shock.

He was passing the wardrobe which was close beside the window Tom was mending, and chanced to look at the glass door, when to his amazement he saw another dog—actually *another live dog*! A white dog with brown ears! He could hardly believe his own eyes.



Actually another live dog!!

He stood perfectly still and looked at the stranger.

The other dog stood perfectly still and looked at him.

This annoyed Mac, because he thought as he was a Very Important Person the other dog ought to have come up slowly and politely and apologetically to him, and explained who he was, and begged pardon for presuming to be there.

Whereas he did nothing of the kind.

Evidently he needed to be taught manners! And Mac decided to teach him without further waste of time. So he growled, and then went up to the glass barking fiercely, in order to tell the stranger exactly what he thought of his impudence in being there.

But instead of apologizing at once, and going away, the other dog rushed up to the glass too, and *he* growled and barked!

Of course Mac wasn't going to stand this! And made for the stranger, intending to give him a thorough good whacking. But—when he tried to get at him—the glass was in the way! So aggravating! He could see him so clearly, and he looked a very cheeky dog too. One who needed to be taken down a few pegs. Yet every time he tried to get hold of him, he only succeeded in knocking his own nose against the glass, while the strange dog was only half an inch away.

He tried to open the door of the wardrobe to catch that wretched dog, who

was evidently inside. Yet he couldn't manage it. He looked round to see if anyone would come and help him. And there was that Tom Tompkins standing and laughing at him! Laughing aloud!

It did annoy him.

"Go it, my hearty," said Tom. "You just give that other dog 'what for'." And he roared with laughter again.

But by this time Mac realized that he couldn't reach this new enemy. And he hated it if anyone laughed at him. Moreover he was so sad that he could have cried, to think that his dear mistress should have another dog in the house! And taking such care of him, too, in that wardrobe. That was really the dreadful part of it.

He understood now why he was never supposed to come upstairs. Of course they didn't want him to know that they kept another dog up there on the other side of the glass.

He was utterly miserable. And he wanted to go away, and hide himself where no one would see him.

Of course, they didn't really love him. They had only pretended that they cared for him. Evidently it was that white dog with the brown ears that they really loved. And that was why the Lady had him up there in her room.

And that horrid Tom was still laughing!

Mac went slowly downstairs. He saw no one, so he slipped out of doors in search of some quiet place where he could lie down, and think it over, and decide what to do.

He went down the garden, and along paths, and across one of the fields—scarcely looking where he was going, and without even bothering to chase the farm cat when he saw her. This very much surprised her; and it also surprised Bushy Tail who happened to be in a tree near by. But, as a matter of fact, the sight of the farm cat reminded him of her herrings—and, as you may remember, at the moment he was suffering from what they called "a chill"!

Presently he found himself in the Nightingale Tangle. This wood is a mass of flowers and blackberries and trees and ferns and honeysuckle and nut-bushes—a lovely place, where nothing is allowed to be cut down because of the nightingales.

These birds go away every autumn to a warmer country, and come back in the spring. And they are *most* particular about their nests. They come back to the same wood year after year, and build close about the same place every spring, so long as they find that nothing has been disturbed.

But if, when they come back, they find that bushes and trees have been cut down, they are suspicious at once.

"This place won't do for us now!" Mr. Nightingale says. "Evidently the people are going to cut it all down. And supposing some of it should fall on

our nest, what would happen to the children? No, we must find a safer place than this, my dear.”

And off they go to another spot that doesn't appear to have been touched for years. And there they make their new home.

Now there were several families of nightingales in that Tangle. They came back every year, and built their nests on the ground, right in the thick of the brambles and ferns, and in the midst of bushes. So nothing was allowed to be cut there. And any summer night you can hear them singing, all in the dark. It does sound so beautiful.

But Mac wasn't thinking about nightingales indeed! He had a big sorrow in his loving little heart. He had never felt unhappy like this in all his life before. Why it was even worse than the pain he had after eating the farm cat's dinner!

He did so love his master and his mistress. He would have done anything in his power for them—killed lions and tigers and elephants, if need be. But he did want to be their one little dog, the only dog whom they patted and loved. He couldn't bear to think that they didn't really love him.

He lay down at last on the grass under a tree, and just wished he could die—his sorrow hurt him so much. He could cry here all he wanted to, for no one was likely to come into this wood.

He didn't know that Bushy Tail had followed him, *very* quietly, in the tree-tops. He couldn't make out what was the matter with Mac, but evidently *something* was wrong or he wouldn't have taken no notice of the cat.

“I wonder what's up?” the squirrel said to himself.

“Here's *another* one going off travelling! Everyone seems to be moving nowadays! We shall want a pantehnicon soon! But he does look down in the mouth, poor thing! It's those herrings, I expect! And wasn't the cat in a tantrum about losing her supper, too! Why, I do declare he's crying. Perhaps I had better drop down and try to cheer him.”

But at that moment there was A SOUND! Not a large one. Probably you or I wouldn't have noticed it at all.

The little People of the Forest have keener hearing than we have, however. And they can detect very slight noises, and know at once if they are different from usual.

At the SOUND up jumped Mac and up jumped Bushy Tail.

But whereas Bushy Tail said to himself, “Danger! I must save myself and clear out of this”—rushing out of the wood as fast as his legs would carry him—Mac said, “Danger! Something's wrong. I must go and see what it is; and



see if I can be of any assistance!”  
And he rushed as fast as he could  
right into the wood, to the place  
where the SOUND came from.

And there—he found  
something very wrong, oh, very  
wrong indeed!



## CHAPTER XII

### THE REAL KING IS CROWNED

When Mac reached the spot where he had heard the noise, he tried at once to do something, anything, to help. But he was only such a little dog. Oh, how he wished he were as big as an elephant, *then* it would have been so easy to settle the trouble. He tried and tried, but he only had his small teeth, and he was afraid they wouldn't be of much use. Yet he did his best with them!

That wasn't enough, though; he knew that. And he must fetch help. It was so dreadfully serious.

He tore back to the house like lightning; his little legs hardly seemed to touch the ground, he went so quickly. He was so out of breath he could hardly speak. But he managed to say, BARK! BARK! BARK! as he rushed up to Cook.

"What's the matter?" she asked him kindly, but without paying very much attention to him. "Are you hungry?" and she reached for a biscuit and gave it him. But he wouldn't look at it.

BARK! BARK! BARK! Oh why ever were they so stupid? And he was telling them how urgent it was.

Tom Tompkins was in the kitchen. He was having a drink of water. There was some tea and sugar and milk in it, of course, with some bread and butter and jam and cake.

"What's all the row?" he asked Mac. "Want to fight that dog upstairs, do you?"

BARK! BARK! BARK! He was getting desperate now, and ran up to the housemaid, who had come into the room.

"I can't think what he's barking at," said Cook. "There's no one at either of the doors."

BARK! BARK! BARK! Then he ran out of the back door, to show them the trouble was out that way. The gardener was coming in, also for a drink of water—with all the rest of it.

Mac thought that perhaps he would be more sensible, so he barked at him.

"All right, sonny," said the gardener. "Tea-time, is it? I'm ready."

But Mac didn't mean him to wait for tea. He caught hold of his boot-lace, and tried to drag him down the garden towards the gate.

"What ails this dog?" he called out. "Something seems to be wrong."

Cook and all the others came to the door, and said they were sure *they* didn't know, but he certainly was "acting queer."

Then the little dog ran to the gate, barking and looking back to see that the

gardener was following him. He didn't wait for the gate to be opened, as he usually did, but jumped clean over it, and ran on.



Looking back to see that  
The gardener was following

“Well, *that’s* a rum go!” said the gardener. “Never saw him do *that* before. Seems a bit wrong in his head somehow! But I’d better go on and see what it’s all about, though I expect it’s only that old cat up in a tree, and he wants me to rout her out.”

To his surprise Mac led the way to the Nightingale Tangle.

“Now what in creation can he want in there?” the gardener thought.

BARK! BARK! BARK! The little white dog ran on—over the brook, along the bluebell ledge, over another brook, and the gardener hurried after him. And then—

“Hello! HELLO there!” a voice called out.

“Aye! Aye! sir,” shouted the gardener, and at last he really did hurry!

And there, endeavouring to crawl along somehow on all fours, was the Gentleman! and Mac running round and round him, trying to lick his hands and face.

“I’m afraid I’ve broken my leg,” his master said. “You’ll have to help me home.”





“Don’t you move another step, sir,” said the gardener anxiously. “I’ll get

help in a few moments if you'll wait there. Did you fall down."

"No. I was looking round in here when I chanced to come upon that wretch of a man who has been trapping the birds. Before I could say a word he gave me a blow, which knocked me over, and I struck my leg on a rock. Just then Mac came along and caught hold of him. Of course he was no match for the man. But—there's the piece of his trousers!" pointing to a piece of rag on the ground.

"Good old boy!" said the gardener. "I'll get help now, sir, if you wait here. The dog will stay with you, though I don't like leaving you alone, in case that brute should come back."

"He won't! He made off as fast as he could. Tell them to 'phone the police. A red-headed man with one trouser leg in ribbons. And, before you go, let out that poor little goldfinch that's in the cage over there. He dropped it in his hurry——"

You can understand the commotion that followed when the gardener got back with the news.

Henry, the chauffeur, was at that moment garaging the car. He and Tom Tompkins and the man who looked after the cows quickly got the top of an old table, which was put away in a barn because it, too, had broken its legs! However, it came in useful again.

They carried it to the Nightingale Tangle and put the Gentleman on it, so as to keep his poor leg from being shaken, and all four men carried him back to the house, Mac walking beside them to see that they did it properly, and also to guard them in case that dreadful man should turn up again.

Though I am glad to say that by this time he was safely in the police station! The 'phone message had sent the policemen out on their motor-bikes, and they soon found him.

Which served him right!

Although everyone was as busy as could be, getting the Gentleman into bed and attending to the doctor, and one thing and another, they none of them forgot Mac.

"What a dear old pet!" said Cook, and gave him a juicy bit of roast beef.

"And to think how he tried to tell us all about it," said the housemaid, and cut off a little bit of fried liver and gave him.

"He's a wonderful animal. Wonderful!" said Tom Tompkins, who was now having some bread and meat, as he had stayed late to help with the Gentleman. And he gave him a nice chop bone.

"He's a darling," said the Lady. "And the dearest and most intelligent dog in the world. Cook, he might have that beef bone, I think, as a special treat."

"Good old boy," said the gardener. "Brave old chap. Here's a shoulder-of-mutton bone that my wife has sent you."

"If it hadn't bin fer that thur dog we might all have bin dead in our beds by now!" said the cowman. And he gave Mac a nice large piece of cheese.

By this time Mac was beginning to feel rather full! So he thought he would put by these lovely bones till to-morrow. They were too valuable to bury in his box. Who knows, but a burglar might get them if he left them there! So, when no one was looking, he took one upstairs. Then a bright idea occurred to him. Perhaps his dear master might like one?

So he crept into his room with the big beef bone in his mouth. There was no one there, for the Lady was downstairs talking to the doctor, and the Gentleman seemed asleep.

Mac thought for a moment. Then seeing the bottom drawer of a chest open a little way, he slipped the bone in there—on top of his master's white shirts! "Won't he be pleased when he finds it there?" said Mac to himself.

Then he decided that his dear mistress ought to have one too. So he buried the shoulder-of-mutton bone under the best cushion in her favourite easy-chair in the drawing-room. She would find it when she sat down on the cushion. Wouldn't it be a pleasant surprise for her?

All of a sudden—he remembered that dog upstairs. He had forgotten every word about him in the general excitement.

However, he would go up at once and tell him that he could clear himself off, for no one wanted him now. He hadn't saved his master's life. *He* wasn't the dearest and most intelligent dog in the whole world.

Upstairs he marched, feeling and knowing that he was a Truly Very Important Person now, and one who wouldn't stand nonsense from any dog.

Into the bedroom he went, and over to the wardrobe beside the window. But—no dog was to be seen! And there was no glass either!

"That's all right," he said. "Evidently the creature has gone. And good riddance too. We don't need any other dogs here, and certainly we don't want a cheeky, ugly, miserable, gawky, impertinent animal like that one was. I'm sure my mistress couldn't love such an uninteresting-looking creature as *he* was."

And downstairs he went, quite satisfied with himself and everything else.

In the hall he found his mistress talking to Tom Tompkins, or, rather, Tom was talking to his mistress. He was saying—

"I'm very sorry, ma'am, I wouldn't have had it happen for worlds, and me as careful as I always am. But the pair of steps simply went through the glass and smashed it to atoms while I was looking the other way!"

Mac went on into the kitchen, because he had still that chop bone to bury. He didn't care to risk leaving anything so precious in his box.

Cook was telling the gardener:

"I always do say it's unlucky to break a looking-glass. And aren't I right?"

Just see what's happened since that donkey Tompkins broke the wardrobe mirror!"

"Oh, well, it's lucky we've got such a knowing customer as Mac on the premises," said the gardener.

"Yes! He'll be the Pride of the Parish now. I shouldn't wonder but what they put his photograph in the papers——"

"And I hope they'll put in a photograph of that man's trousers beside him, for judging by the piece Mac secured, they would make a pretty picture!"

Mac listened to all this, and felt himself growing inches and inches bigger. Cook was a dear. He did love her, and she was always so kind to him.

Then he had yet another bright idea. He would let *her* have the chop bone, as she was so loving. So he slipped away quietly, with the bone in his mouth, and went upstairs and found her Sunday shoes in the corner of her room. The very thing! He buried the chop bone in one of these.

"Won't she be happy when she finds such a nice present waiting for her?" he said. "And such a lovely greasy bone, too!"

And then, being rather tired after all the events of the day, he curled up in his box and went to sleep.

Next morning he heard Cook tell the milkman all about it. And the milkman said he had always known he was a remarkable dog. And patted him.

And she told the baker. And the baker said he didn't suppose his master would part with him for a thousand golden sovereigns. And he patted him.

And she told the butcher. And he said that was the sort of dog *he* wanted. But he didn't want to give him any of his trousers, because they were his second best ones. And he patted him.

Then the housemaid told the postman. And the postman said you could see he was a champion, the shape of his head would tell anyone that. And he patted him.

And the gardener told the doctor's chauffeur. And he said he expected that a lot of people would be glad to buy a dog like that. He wouldn't mind having him himself. And he patted him.

And the gardener began to tell the coalman. But the coalman didn't wait to listen, because his dog and Mac were starting to fight, and everybody ran out and said, "Oh dear! Oh dear! If anything were to happen to that darling dog, his master and mistress would *never* get over it."

And the gardener ran and the cowman ran and Henry ran, and between them all they fastened the coalman's dog to the cart and took Mac indoors, and gave him a ham bone this time. And Mac felt very brave, because he was sure he had just rescued the family from another wild animal!

## Everybody ran out



Now, you may be surprised to hear this, but it is a fact that he was beginning to get a little fed-up with bones! There seemed no end to them, so he buried that one under the dining-room hearth-rug, and then strolled out of doors to have a look round, and make sure there wasn't any other wicked man prowling about who needed his attention.

Finding that everything was safe and satisfactory, and that Henry was polishing the car properly, and the man was cleaning out the cow-houses properly, and the gardener digging things up quite properly, he decided to go down to the Windflower Wood and tell them the news.

But when he arrived at the top of the Ferny Path, and looked up and down, quite casually, in his usual way, he was surprised to hear everyone start clapping and clapping—with their beaks (birds can't clap with their hands). The woodpeckers tapped loudly on the tree-trunks; the tits and nut-hatches hammered on the branches; the magpies made ever such a clatter with their beaks. Altogether the noise was quite deafening. And the owl woke up and stuck his head out of his cosy hole, and, in a very annoyed voice, asked, "Who—who—who—is it *this* time?"

And the little goldfinch spoke up and said, "It's that wonderful dog who bit the man who caught me in a cage. I've been telling them all about it, Mr. Owl, but you were having your nap, and didn't hear me. I'll tell you about it now if you like."

"I *don't* like," said the owl crossly. "This wood gets worse and worse. It

isn't fit to sleep in for the noise. Yesterday afternoon you were all shouting round that good-for-nothing young Bobbie. Now you're hammering my head off over that dog. I'll take a flat across the river if this sort of thing goes on, that I will!"

"There's another one going to move," chuckled the squirrel. "What a moving story this is!"

"Oh *do* be kind, everybody. *Do* be kind," said the wood-pigeon. "He's a wonderful dog, and we're so proud of him."

"And so say all of us," said the squirrel. "Three cheers for the champion and the hero and all the rest of it."

"Hip, hip, hoo-ra-a-a-y!" they all said.

While Mac tried to look very modest, though of course he couldn't help knowing that he was a Certainly Very Important Person.

Then the jackdaw hopped forward. As you know, jackdaws are very fond of picking up things. He had something in his beak. He put it down and held it with his claw while he made a little speech, in which he said what a wonderful dog Mac was! (Cheers.) How they had always loved him. (Louder cheers.) And how they would always go on loving him. (Very much loudest cheers.) And if anyone disagreed would they kindly signify in the usual manner? Whereupon the cat, who had been polishing her whiskers on the wall, said "Scr-r-r-r-stch—yeow-pst!" and disappeared over the wall before anyone could catch her.

"Nobody disagrees," said the jackdaw, "because of course there is nothing to disagree about. And, in any case, that cat is nobody. Moreover we none of us ever disagree about anything. Therefore I will proceed with the business of this happy meeting, and ask you to accept this little present as a small token of our love and affection."

And with that he dropped the bone from a mutton cutlet, and it fell on Mac's head without hurting him.—So that was the way he was crowned.



So that was the way he was crowned

Immediately everyone said, "Hip, hip, hoor-a-a-a-ay!" a number of times, and "How d'you do!" "Shake claws, old man!" "Say when!" "You're one of

the best!” “Any time you’re passing, you know!” and more remarks like that.

Mac swelled visibly, till it looked as though he would have to buy a new fur coat! He assured them that he was only too pleased to be of service, and if they were in town, no need to go to Uncle Twitter’s flat, *he* could always put them up. And so on. Quite a lot.

Then all the inhabitants of the Wood started singing—to the accompaniment of “Sc-r-r-um-aw-yow-ow, spst-spst-spst, scratch” over the wall:

#### THE GOOD-BYE SONG

Such a wonderful family all of us are  
Who live in the Windflower Wood!  
We clatter and chatter,  
But what does it matter,  
So long as we try to be good?

There is gay Uncle Twitter,  
Who saw such a glitter  
Of crystal and gold in his flat.  
And young master Bobbie  
Whose principal hobby  
Is boasting of this and of that!

Don’t forget Mrs. Starling!  
She is such a darling  
At eating up everyone’s dinner;  
And though she is sure  
Her digestion is poor  
She certainly doesn’t get thinner!

Doctor Magpie you know,  
Who is willing to go  
To the Man in the Moon if he’s queer!  
While the jackdaws and jays  
Argue most of their days.  
But sweet Mrs. Robin’s a dear.

And of course you will see,  
High up in a tree,  
Saucy squirrel scampaging around.  
But you’ll find  
He is kind;  
And I’m sure he won’t mind  
If you pick up his nuts from the ground.

Should you meet Mr. Crow  
(The policeman, you know,)  
He will look at you *very* severely!  
And say “MOVE ON THERE!”  
But no one will care,



Or bother to “move-on-there” really!

We are such a nice crowd,  
And we always are proud  
To show you the things we can do.  
We can stand on our heads!  
And make our own beds!  
And build our own houses! Can you?

But though we are clever,  
There’s one thing we never  
Can do—though we wish that we could!  
We can’t bite the clothes  
Of the Bad Man who goes  
To catch bunnies and birds in our wood!

But there’s someone who can!  
And he caught the Bad Man!  
So that now he will never come back!  
And that’s why we sing  
That we choose for our king  
The brave little doggie named MAC.

Then louder the company sang:  
“Our Mac is the Head of the Gang.  
He’s the champion chief,  
For he caught the bold thief!  
Good old Mac! Bang-a-bang! Bang! BANG!”



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[The end of *The Lady-with-the-Crumbs* by Flora Klickmann]