

## THE BUSY BLUE JAY: TRUE BIRD STORIES FROM MY NOTEBOOKS

### CHAPTER 2

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Jakie had decided opinions about people who came into the room to see me, or to see the birds. At some persons he would squawk every moment. Others he saluted with a queer cry like “Ob-ble! ob-ble! ob-ble!” Once when a lady came in with a baby, he fixed his eyes on that infant with a savage look as if he would like to peck it, and jumped back and forth in his cage, panting, but perfectly quiet.

Jakie was very devoted to me. He always greeted me with a low, sweet chatter, with wings quivering, and if he were out of the cage he would come on the back of my chair and touch my cheek or lips very gently with his beak, or offer me a bit of food if he had any; and to me alone, when no one else was near, he sang a low, exquisite song. I afterwards heard a similar song sung by a wild blue jay to his mate while she was sitting, and so I knew that my dear little captive had given me his sweetest—his love song.

One of Jakie’s amusements was dancing across the back of a tall chair, taking funny little steps, coming down hard, “jouncing” his body, and whistling as loud as he could. He would keep up this funny performance as long as anybody would stand before him and pretend to dance, too.

My jay was fond of a sensation. One of his dearest bits of fun was to drive the birds into a panic. This he did by flying furiously around

the room, feathers rustling, and squawking as loud as he could. He usually managed to fly just over the head of each bird, and as he came like a catapult, every one flew before him, so that in a minute the room was full of birds flying madly about trying to get out of his way. This gave him great pleasure.

Wild blue jays, too, like to stir up their neighbors. A friend told me of a small party of blue jays that she saw playing this kind of a joke on a flock of birds of several kinds, robins, catbirds, thrashers, and others. These birds were gathering the cherries on the top branches of a big cherry tree. The jays sat quietly on another tree till the cherry eaters were very busy eating. Then suddenly the mischievous blue rogues would all rise together and fly at them, as my pet did at the birds in the room. It had the same effect on the wild birds; they all flew in a panic. Then the joking jays would return to their tree and wait till their victims forgot their fear and came straggling back to the cherries, when they repeated the fun.

Once a grasshopper got into the Bird Room, probably brought in clinging to some one’s dress in the way grasshoppers do. Jakie was in his cage, but he noticed the stranger instantly, and I opened the door for him. He went at once to look at the grasshopper, and when it hopped he was so startled that he hopped, too. Then he picked the insect up, but he did

not know what to do with it, so he dropped it again. Again the grasshopper jumped directly up, and again the jay did the same. This they did over and over, till every one was tired laughing at them. It looked as if they were trying to see who could jump the higher.

There was another bird in the room, however, who knew what grasshoppers were good for. He was an orchard oriole, and after looking on for a while, he came down and carried off the hopper to eat. The jay did not like to lose his plaything; he ran after the thief, and stood on the floor giving low cries and looking on while the oriole on a chair was eating the dead grasshopper. When the oriole happened to drop it, Jakie—who had got a new idea of what to do with grasshoppers—snatched it up and carried it under a chair and finished it.

I could tell many more stories about my bird, but I have told them before in one of my “grown-up” books, so I will not repeat them here.