

SEVEN O'CLOCK STORIES



Ninth Night: Another True Fairy Story



Jehosophat, Marmaduke, and Hepzebiah were very happy as they watched the fairy story of the flowers. They were happier still because they helped it grow. But of course that did not take all of their time. So one morning when Marmaduke had eaten up all of his oatmeal and the cream, which Buttercup had given him, he laid his spoon down and said:

“Won’t you show us another story, ‘cause we can’t watch our gardens all day long?”

“Yes,” said Mother, “let me think what it will be.”

So Mother thought awhile.

“I’ll get Mother Nature to show you another story. But you can’t help with this one. You’ll just have to watch. It’s made by the birds themselves.”

Then she looked at the calendar.

“Why, it’s the fourteenth of May. He ought to be here pretty soon.”

“Who ought to be here soon?” asked Jehosophat.

“Why, the Oriole, the Baltimore Oriole, on his way back from the South, where he lives all winter.”

“How do you know he’ll come soon?” the three children asked, all in the same breath.

“He always comes back about the middle of May. City folks call May first

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'Moving Day,' but the fifteenth is the Oriole's Moving Day."

So Mother led them out of the front door.

"Just sit in that swing or play with the pine needles and watch that elm. Don't make too much noise now! Maybe he'll come today."

And the children played in the front of the house all the morning and looked up at the dark green leaves of the elm every once in a while. But no bright little bird messenger came.

They were very much disappointed but Mother said:

"Never mind, tomorrow is his Moving Day and I think he'll come then. He is usually pretty prompt."

That night Uncle Roger came to the house with Aunt Mehitable. As a special treat the children were allowed to stay up late and hear Uncle Roger's stories of the great sea.

They stayed up very late, although the Little-Clock-with-the-Wise-Face-on-the-Mantle spoke several times. So next morning they were very tired. The sun was warm and while Jehosophat, Marmaduke and Hepzebiah sat on the porch they fell asleep. Jehosophat's head nodded against one post, Marmaduke's against another post, while little Hepzebiah fell asleep between them on the floor of the porch.

"Wow, wow, wow," growled Rover, "let's go out in the barnyard and chase the White Wyandottes. It's no fun playing with sleepy children."

"Wow, wow, wow!" answered Brownie and little Wienerwurst together, and this in dog's language means "Yes."

So they romped away to the barnyard to chase the frightened White Wyandottes.

That was not a good thing for the chickens but it was a good thing for the children. For if the dogs had not run away they might have missed something very wonderful.

What do you think it was?

First they heard pretty strains of music. It was something like a song and something like a whistle.

They looked up in the elm tree.

There, shining among the dark green leaves, was a pretty thing with orange and black feathers. He whistled away as if he did not have a care in the world.

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And they did not have to be told—they knew who it was. It was their old friend, the Oriole.

He didn’t stay still very long ever, for he was a busy fellow. But once he swung on a twig for a little while. They saw that he was almost as big as a robin, with head and shoulders of black, the wings black too, and most of his tail. But the rest of his body was like the prettiest orange-coloured velvet they had ever seen. He was singing something like this:

”What a fine day, what a fine day.

I can sing and build, for work is play.”

And every once in a while he would fly over to the apple tree and hop from branch to branch between the pink and white blossoms, looking for food. He was very fond of those caterpillars in the tree, you see. In between mouthfuls he would whistle just part of his song,

“A-ver-y-fine-day!”

Then he would take another bite, hop to another branch and whistle again:

“A-ver-y-fine-day!”

He certainly seemed to be happy over the beautiful weather.

Then he would whistle again as if he were talking to someone.

The three sleepy children listened.

“Now that nest, dear, now that nest, dear. We must build that nest, before we rest.”

To whom could he be talking?

They looked around. And there, hopping about on a spray of beautiful apple blossoms, was another bird. It was Mother Oriole. She was almost like Father Oriole, only her coat was not as bright as his. It is funny the way birds are dressed, isn’t it? What would you think if some Sunday your Father went to church in a black coat with a yellow vest, while Mother wore some very dull colour? You would laugh. But that is the way with birds. The father bird always wears brighter colours than the mother.

The three happy children were glad that the mother bird had come with the father bird up from the sunny South. They heard him whistle again:

”In the Winter we go South, dear,

But in the Spring to the North we wing.”

Then together they flew back to the elm. They were house-hunting. Back on

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the roof of the barn there was a little house of wood with doors for the pretty pigeons, but there were no houses of any kind on the old elm. Still the Orioles did not worry about that. They were not lazy, oh no!

They were just looking for a place to build. They must have found it, for the Oriole sang again (he was always changing his song):

”My dear, my dear,
Sunny—quiet—lovely—here.”

He had chosen a branch about thirty feet from the ground. Mother Oriole quietly answered back that it suited her perfectly. They both flew down to the ground, then back to the tree. And every time they travelled they had little pieces of grass or bark in their bills. But Mother Oriole did most of this work, which was quite proper, for mothers always do most of the work about the house, don't they? Father Oriole, you see, was more interested in getting fat beetles and caterpillars for food. And that was quite right too. But once he sang out louder than ever, for he had found a bit of string from Jehosophat's broken kite.

“The very thing, the very thing,” he said to her.

And once Mother Oriole found, caught in the shutter, little threads of Hepzebiah's hair.

Then the three happy children woke up. They rubbed their eyes. They had been dreaming in the warm sun.

But their dream was true and the fairy story was true.

For there were the two birds, very pretty and very much alive. They were busily flying to the earth again and back to the elm branch. And they were carrying the materials for their new home in their beaks.

They perched on the branch and crocheted with their beaks. Yes, crocheted the little bits of bark and string and grass and hair into a tiny nest. Hanging down from the branch, it looked like the pretty soft grey bags which ladies carry, only it was very small.

And between whiles Father Oriole would whistle in delight and Mother Oriole would answer back quietly.

They were very happy birds and were quite content with the warm sun and the cool elm leaves and the pretty apple blossoms and their breakfast and dinner and supper. And they were very grateful to the good God who had

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given these things to them, grateful and happy as all little children should be.

But that is not the end of the fairy story. No, that is—but the Little-Clock-with-the-Wise-Face-on-the-Mantel won't let us tell any more. His silver voice says:

“Ting—ting—ting—ting—ting—ting—ting,” which means:

“Tell—that—tale—a—noth—er—time.”

So good-night.