

SEVEN O'CLOCK STORIES



Tenth Night: The Happy Ending of the Oriole's Story



All stories should have an ending. It's fine, isn't it, when they end happily?
And this story of the Orioles did end happily—oh, so happily!

It was this way, you see.

The little grey house on the elm was finished.

It hung down from the end of the green branch, under the leaves. It looked both like a fairy house and a little crocheted bag.

Now for some days Mother Oriole didn't go out very much. She stayed in her little house.

But Father Oriole kept about his work, hunting for the little brown crawling things and the green crawling things that made their food.

He would whistle every once in a while to tell Mother Oriole that he was near. Sometimes it was just a few notes to say:

"I'm still here—my dear,
Still here, still here, still here."

Sometimes:

"All right, my love!"

Sometimes just:

"All's well!"

But if a strange man came too near the tree his song was sharp and angry.

"Look out, look out, look out!"

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He’s a rogue, an awful rogue, look out, I say!”

But somehow he didn’t seem to mind the children.

“Why does Mother Oriole sit so quietly on her nest?” Marmaduke asked his own mother.

“I wish I could lift you up so that you could see. But the nest is too high up. It’s out of harm’s way. Dicky Means, who has a cruel heart and robs birds’ nests, can’t reach it way up there!”

“What’s in it, Muvver?” asked little Hepzebiah. You see her little tongue didn’t work just right. She never could say words with “th” in them.

“Little eggs, dear. They are white, with little dark spots and funny dark scrawls on them as if somebody had tried to write with a bad pen.”

Then Marmaduke asked:

“And is she keeping them warm?”

“Yes, so that they will hatch out. They will, very soon now.”

So for a number of days in the warm weather, and in the rainy weather too, Mother Oriole sat faithfully on her nest. Bird mothers and the mothers of little children are always very patient. Then came one fine morning when the sun was particularly jolly and bright, and the blossoms smelt very sweet and were beginning to fall from the trees. The three happy children stood under the elm and looked up at the tiny hanging nest.

They heard new noises, strange noises.

It sounded like babies.

Yes, the little Oriole babies had broken their shells and had been born at last.

They didn’t have many clothes on. But some day their feathers will be as pretty as their father’s.

How they did cry for food! Somehow baby Orioles cry more than other bird babies. They seem to want to eat all the time.

And how Father Oriole did work to keep them fed, whistling every once in a while to make things pleasant for his family! I wonder if they appreciated all the things he and Mother Oriole did for them. And the days passed and the little birds grew fatter on the bugs and the beetles which their father brought, just as fat as the little boys or girls on their oatmeal and bread and milk, which their fathers work hard to earn for them.

The little Orioles were certainly noisy little birds, and when they cried some-

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times the children saw funny little heads and beaks poking out of the nest.

Then more days passed and Father and Mother Oriole taught them to fly, just as Father and Mother Green had taught little Hepzebiah to walk. Marmaduke remembered how his Mother had held Hepzebiah and Father stood a little way off. Then Hepzebiah had started. She was a little frightened at first but she made the journey. It was only a few steps and her father caught her before she fell. She tried this often and soon she could take a great many steps.

And that was something like the way Father and Mother Oriole taught their children to fly. The parent birds would fly to a branch a little way off. Then they would call the little birds. And one by one they would fly to the branch. Their wings were weak at first like Hepzebiah's little feet. But soon they grew strong and before many weeks had gone they could fly as fast as the old birds. And before the summer was over they were as big as their parents. You see birds have shorter lives than real people. They do not live so many years. So they have to grow up quickly or they wouldn't have much time for work and play, would they?

So the children decided that the story of the Orioles was a very pretty fairy story, indeed, and they liked it better because it was true.

And they found others—oh, so many stories like it.

For sometimes Mother and sometimes Father and sometimes the Toyman showed them other little bird homes.

They climbed a ladder and found the barn-swallow's nest plastered under the eaves of the barn. They liked the barn swallow who flew through the air, almost as if he were so happy that he danced as he flew. And his dress was so pretty, for he was dark blue on top, brown on the throat, and his little stomach was white. His tail was forked too, cut like the coat of the man in the circus who cracked the whip and made the horses perform tricks.

The barn swallow's nest was so cunningly made. It was plastered of mud and grass, and had a soft grass lining. The little eggs in it were white and had tiny brown spots.

Right near the bay window, in the thick lilac tree, Marmaduke spied Red Robin's nest. He was a great friend of theirs. They always liked the cheery way he hopped over the lawn, and his cheery red vest, and his song which always said:

”Che-er up—che-er up!”

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His eggs were the prettiest of all, a greenish blue, a robin's-egg blue, the dressmakers call it. Mother Green's summer dress was coloured just like it.

And in a bush by the roadside, Hepzebiah spied the brown thrush's nest. His eggs were blue and spotted with brown.

And in the elderberry tree they found the grey cat-bird's nest. He was a funny bird, always crying like a lost pussy. And his eggs were green-blue.

So in the fields and the woods Jehosophat, Marmaduke and Hepzebiah saw all kinds of birds and all kinds of nests and all kinds of eggs. They saw them because their eyes were bright and sharp as yours must be too when you go into the beautiful country.

And from the eggs funny little birds were born and grew up and flew and sang.

And so the three happy children decided that the really true fairy stories of Mother Nature were the prettiest of all.

And oh—we almost forgot! Perhaps we can tell the rest before that Little-Clock-with-the-Wise-Face-on-the-Mantel tells us to stop.

Over near Neighbour Brown's fence they were peeping through the green leaves at the song-sparrow's nest. Mother was with them and they saw someone come out of their neighbour's house.

"Wouldn't you like to see her?" the strange lady whispered to Mother.

"Oh yes," Mother whispered back, "but they mustn't wake her up."

Who could they be talking about? Then they went through the gate.

"Be very quiet," said Mother as they entered the door, "and you'll see the end of another true fairy story."

So they tiptoed in.

There in a bed lay Mrs. Brown, looking very happy.

And curled up in her arm she had—well, what do you think she had?

A little sleeping baby!

Like the little Orioles Baby had been born just a few days ago.

"That," said Mother, "is the prettiest fairy story of all."

And the children thought so too.

There—we've finished just in time. We hear the Little Clock. There goes his silver tongue now.

Good-night! Sweet Dreams.