

WHAT HAPPENED IN BIRDVILLE



By FRED M. RICE

It was a bright May morning, sun glimmering through the trees, birds or rather bird people, as I am telling about birds, flew back and forth among the trees. Mr. Bluejay, the only store keeper in this aerial township, was just remarking to a neighbor on the fine weather, when zipp! bing! and a rock came crashing through the trees. It almost killed Mr. Bluejay with fright. He dodged into his house as fast as he could, and fell on the floor unconscious.

When Mr. Bluejay awoke he found two officers of the law, Mr. Hawk and brother, standing over him and sprinkling dew from leaves on his head. He jumped up, thanked them for their kindness and then told them his experience. Not knowing whence the rock came, the hawks had to go and hunt up its source.

After awhile the door opened and Mr. Sparrow, who had some hopes of being Miss Canary's mate, flew in to visit for a moment. He carried some linseed as a present to Miss Canary. During the visit he was told what had happened to Mr. Bluejay earlier in the morning. He expressed a hope that the culprits be caught and spanked, and then he flew away. As he neared the cottage or nest of Miss Canary he heard her singing one of the latest songs of the village.

She stopped when she saw Mr. Sparrow coming.

"I never heard such beautiful singing, Miss Canary," Mr. Sparrow called to her.

"Thank you, Mr. Sparrow; I am much obliged to you. Oh! thank you, Mr. Sparrow; it is so kind of you to give me this linseed," said the maiden.

"Pooh! Pooh! A mere trifle. But I hope Mr. Lark has not been here yet, has he, Miss Canary?"

He said this because Mr. Lark was in hopes of winning Miss Canary himself.

Zipp! Bang! Biff! Another rock flew on its way of destruction. Miss Canary's cottage jumped up into the air, split in the center and fell to pieces on the ground. Miss Canary and Mr. Sparrow flew to a high branch, where they lay hidden from below.

It was well they did, for from the sounds underneath another messenger of death would soon be on its way.

"Aw! can't she shoot straight yet?" a voice was just saying.

"That's all right. Keep quiet, or you'll get shot!" a voice replied.

"Look! Look! Hit him! Hit him! Ow-w! What a beauty." These ejaculations were caused by the sudden appearance of Mr. Sparrow, flying for all he was worth to the police court. A rock was sent after him, but Mr. Sparrow's sudden appearance had the advantage of a good start, and he continued on his way unharmed. As he flew past Mr. Lark's house he heard a loud laugh, not one of mirth, but of a sneering and contemptuous nature. Mr. Sparrow also noticed that the rock had gone dangerously near Mr. Whippoorwill's little dwelling.

At last he arrived at the court, and burst into the room with such a suddenness that the judge ordered him tied up. But his story was soon told, and Judge Eagle, followed by four hawks and Mr. Sparrow, flew out of the door in search of the would-be murderers.

Mr. Sparrow made his way to Miss Canary's place, where he found her crying, and in every way known to women expressing her sorrow over the loss of her cottage. But just then Mrs. Linnet arrived and offered home and food to Miss Canary, which was readily accepted. As they were parting a messenger came from the village, hunting for Mr. Sparrow. The latter had to leave the two ladies and start back to the village, wondering what the judge wanted him for.

In the village he found a crowd of people and a number of policemen,

who quietly surrounded him on sight. "Well, here I am, judge. What's wrong?" he asked.

"What's wrong?" repeated the judge. "Huh! Methinks if you'll stay around here much longer, why, you will see. When we returned from our exciting adventure in the forest Mr. Lark notified us of the death of Mr. Whippoorwill. He claims he saw you and—"

"I don't claim it, sir judge, I know it. I was Jerry on the spot," cut in Mr. Lark in a swaggering voice.

"He claims he saw you—"

"Say, judge, I saw him; I ought to know, and if I—" began Lark again.

"If you interrupt me again I'll throw you into jail. Mr. Lark claims he saw Mr. Sparrow stop at Mr. Whippoorwill's place, talk a while, get excited and then Mr. Sparrow struck Mr. Whippoorwill a blow on the face with his wing. Is that right, Lark?" asked the judge.

"O. K., judge, have a worm," replied that unprincipled bird.

"Judge, if you believe—" began Mr. Sparrow.

"Who asked you to talk? Kindly remain silent while the judge and I have a short talk," spoke up Mr. Lark.

"That's my business, Mr. Lark, and if I choose to speak to Judge—" again started Sparrow.

"Silence! Both of you. Have you any better worm than this, Lark? Phew! Both of you appear tomorrow at court. Good day," and with that he walked out, followed by a couple of hawks.

Sparrow was led away to jail until the morrow, while Lark went about, telling of the awful fate in store for Sparrow.

Miss Canary was once more in her own home and was enjoying a siesta, when she heard the paper boy calling:

"Extra, lady; all about de great murder!"

Wondering, she bought a paper, but she no sooner read the first line than she fell through the tree to the soft grass turf, for she read:

"Mr. Sparrow, cashier at the Commercial bank, murdered."

It was only through the efforts of a policeman and a neighbor that Miss Canary got back home. She refused to explain, but the telltale paper was lying on a branch and the cause was early discovered.

The next day saw the courtroom crowded. But the hum of voices ceased on the approach of the prisoner, closely guarded by two hawks. The judge was some time in getting there,

but with a murmured excuse he flounced down the aisle, tripped and fell on his face. There was a roar of laughter that stopped suddenly as the judge picked himself up. The judge scanned each face for a sign of mirth, but he gave it up, turned and at last got seated on the bench.

"Eh-h! Mr. Sparrow? Oh! yes. Well, what have you to say?" began the judge.

"Judge, I want to say that I never stopped after I left Miss Canary's—"

"Ah-h! a very nice young lady, to be sure—but go on," interrupted Judge Eagle.

"—And I never stopped once, although he over there says I did. I plead not guilty," Mr. Sparrow declared.

"Judge, another worm," started Mr. Lark.

"Another worm, eh? Well, Mr. Hawk, take this worm and jam it down Lark's throat. One of his delightful crawlers kept me awake all night. Next time I'll make you eat your own worms," exclaimed the irate judge. "But get up and talk business."

"Well, judge, I repeat what I said yesterday," said Lark, smiling complacently.

"Well, Sparrow, the odds seem to be against you on circumstantial evidence. You were the only one around Whippoorwill's house."

"But, judge, it's my evidence against his. Do you make me out a fibber? Am I not as good as Lark? But, stay! Here, if that worm makes you sick, why, you may hang me, but until then give me my turn. Isn't that fair?" pleaded the almost crazed Sparrow, handing the judge a fat caterpillar.

"Well, all right. But you will have to stay locked up."

"But how about you, Lark?"

"Eh-h-h! What? How about me? Why, judge, I thought you—I—come here until I whisper to you. Didn't I give you a box of worms? Didn't that fix my freedom? This last in a whisper."

"Oh, no! Oh, no! Do you think I'm a fool? Oh, no! Your Uncle Dudley's alive yet. It's you to the Fir tree, that's all; good day," and with that he strolled out.

Lark was assisted to his new home, while Sparrow started for Miss Canary's, followed by the cheering populace.

That night Mr. Sparrow sat up until 11 o'clock talking to Miss Canary about the events of the day, but before he left he carried with him a

promise held sacred in all love affairs.

Promptly at 10 o'clock the next morning Mr. Eagle strode down the aisle to his seat, through people that jammed the courthouse. Mr. Lark was there, but with a sickly look, while Mr. Sparrow sat opposite him, smiling and pleased with the world as a whole. He had a nod and a good word to every one, and as Judge Eagle came down the aisle he leaned forward, and, calling him, said:

"How were those worms, judge?"

"Eh-h! Oh! say, they were great! Where did—but wait until afterward," replied the judge. He lost no time in getting proceedings started.

"Mr. Sparrow, you are accused of the murder of Mr. Whippoorwill, one of our best citizens. You are accused of running away and getting me and my policemen out of the village on a chase after boys in order that the crime might not be discovered. But Mr. Lark claims that he was present, although unseen by you, and that he saw all that went on. Now, have you anything to say? Can you furnish an alibi?"

"Judge, I can, and what's more I'll account for every minute. But will you kindly allow Mr. Lark to testify first, Judge?" asked Sparrow.

"Mr. Lark, to the—" said the judge.

"Well, judge, I was enjoying the fine weather and—ahem—was—er—standing outside of my door, when suddenly Mr. Sparrow came to Old Man Whip's—"

"Speak reverently of the dead, Lark, or it'll be the worse for you!" hotly exclaimed Judge Eagle.

"And Sparrow stopped and, after arguing over something—ahem!—gave Mr. Whippoorwill a blow on the face with his wing."

"Which wing?" asked the judge.

"Er—er—the—the—I'm sure I don't know, judge, but it's a trifling matter. Well, anyway, Sparrow flew off, but I laughed loud enough for him to hear me so as to let him know one person saw his deed," exclaimed Lark, finishing with a bravado air.

"Judge, I'll tell my story now. When I left Miss Canary's place I kept going until I came to the station. A rock started after me, but missed me, and I thought it went very near Mr. Whippoorwill. Just at the same time I heard Lark laughing. Say, Lark, what time was it you saw me?" asked Mr. Sparrow.

"Well, about 10 o'clock," answered Lark.

"Ah-h! Judge, what time did I reach court?" asked Sparrow, triumphantly.

"You reached here at 10:15, and—"

"Hold! Judge, I am here as the star witness," suddenly exclaimed Mr. Owl, the time keeper, who had just come in. "Lark, how is it you flew to those pine trees when these boys began stoning?"

"Er—er—oh, yes, I think I did fly up there, but—"

"Never mind. How is it, then, that you saw Sparrow from there? What? Now, Lark, from the pine tree to Whippoorwill's is one block and I was a half block nearer than you. I saw all that happened. I couldn't help Mr. Whippoorwill because of danger to my life, and later my duties called me. So, you see, I have got you in a nice place," ended Mr. Owl.

"So, Mr. Lark," roared the judge, "is that what you have been handing us? What? Very well, sir. You go to the Fir tree for five years. Do you hear?"

"Judge, forgive me! I didn't—"

"Stop, you crow! Away with him!" exclaimed the Judge.

A few moments later the jury brought in the verdict: "Whippoorwill killed by the rock sent after Sparrow."

Mr. Sparrow and family live up in Redwood grove, which is a very beautiful suburb of Birdville. He is the president of the bank's private secretary and commands a high salary. Birdville is no longer a village, but has been raised to the distinction of being a town.

Lark is still resting (by force) in the Fir tree.

WONDERING, SHE BOUGHT A PAPER, BUT SHE NO SOONER READ THE FIRST LINE THAN SHE FELL THROUGH THE TREE.