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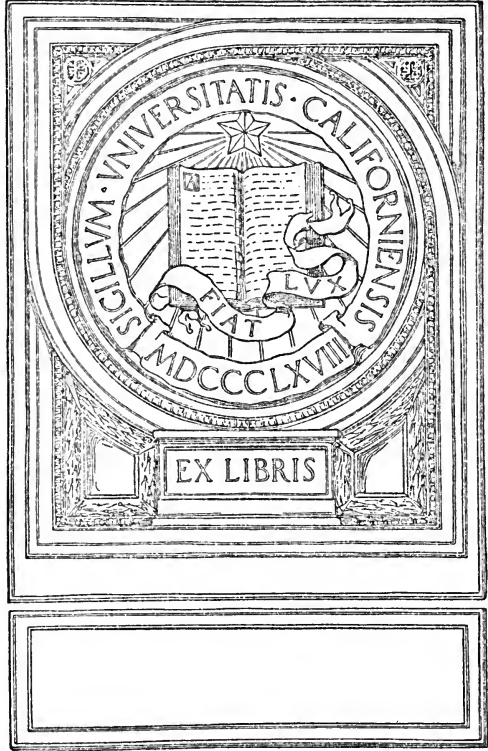


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# THE SONG OF THE CARDINAL

GENE STRATTON-PORTER

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# The Song of the Cardinal

A LOVE STORY

BY

Gene Stratton-Porter

THE ILLUSTRATIONS BEING  
CAMERA STUDIES FROM LIFE  
BY THE AUTHOR.

INDIANAPOLIS  
THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY  
PUBLISHERS

NO, CARDINAL LADIES!

**HO, CARDINAL LADIES!**



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## The Song of the Cardinal

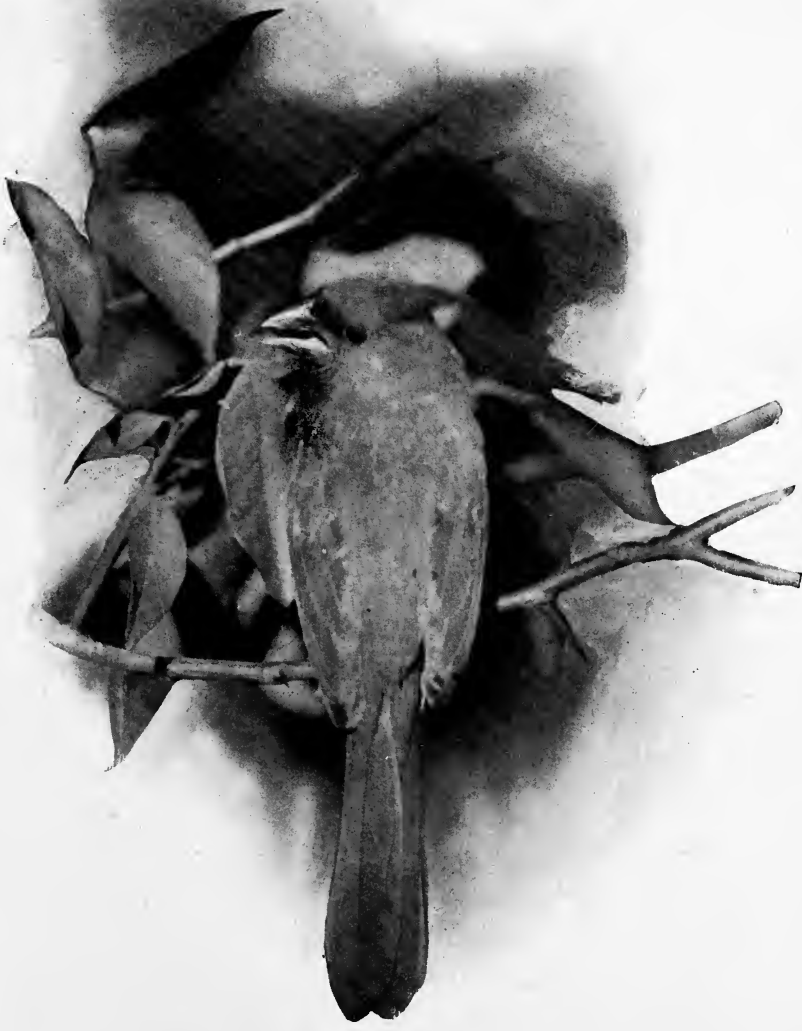


IN LOVING TRIBUTE  
TO THE MEMORY OF MY FATHER  
MARK STRATTON

*“ For him every work of God manifested a  
new and heretofore unappreciated loveliness.”*

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*"Good cheer! Good cheer!" exulted the Cardinal*



He darted about the orange orchard searching for slugs for his breakfast, and between whiles he rocked on the branches and rang over his message of encouragement to men. The song of the Cardinal was overflowing with joy, for this was his holiday, his play-time. The southern world was full of brilliant sun-

shine, gaudy flowers, an abundance of fruit, myriads of insects, and never a thing to do but bathe, feast and be happy. No wonder his song was a prophecy of good cheer for the future, for happiness made up the whole of his past.

The Cardinal was only a yearling, but his crest flared high, his beard was crisp and black, and he was a very

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prodigy for size and coloring. Fathers of his family that had accomplished many migrations looked small beside him, and coats that had been shed season after season seemed dull compared with his. It was as if a pulsing heart of flame passed by when he came winging through the orchard.

Last season the cardinal had pipped his shell, away to the north, in that paradise of the birds, the Limberlost. There thousands of acres of black marsh-muck stretch under summers' sun and winters' snows. There, are darksome pools of murky water, bits of swale and high morass. Giants of the forest reach skyward, or, coated with velvet slime, lie decaying in sun-flecked pools, while the underbrush is almost impenetrable.

The swamp is like a great dining-table for the birds. Wild grape-vines clamber to the tops of the highest trees, spreading umbrella-wise over the branches, and their festooned floating trailers wave like silken fringe with the play of the wind. The birds loll in the shade, peel bark and break off dried curlers for nest material, and feast on the pungent fruit. They chatter in swarms over the wild cherry trees, and overload their crops with red haws, wild plums, papaws, blackberries and mandrake. The alders about the edge draw flocks

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in search of berries, and the marsh grasses and weeds are weighted down with seed hunters. The muck is alive with worms; and the whole swamp ablaze with flowers, whose colors and perfumes attract myriads of insects and butterflies.

Wild creepers flaunt their red and gold from the tree-tops, and the bumblebees and humming-birds make common cause in rifling their honey-laden trumpets. The air about the wild plum and red haw trees is vibrant with the beating wings of millions of wild bees, and the bee-birds feast to gluttony. The fetid odors of the swamp draw flies and mosquitoes in swarms, and fly-catchers tumble and twist in the air in pursuit of them.

Every hollow tree homes its colony of bats. Snakes sun on the bushes. The water folk leave trails of shining ripples in their wake as they cross the lagoons. Turtles waddle off the logs clumsily. Frogs take graceful flying leaps from pool to pool. Everything native to that section of the country, underground, creeping or a-wing, can be found in the Limberlost; but above all it is the chosen habitation of the birds.

Dainty green warblers nest in its tree-tops, and red-eyed vireos choose a location below. Bellbirds, finches,

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and thrushes home there. There are flocks of black-birds, grackles, and crows. Jays and catbirds quarrel constantly, and marsh wrens keep up never-ending chatter. Orioles swing their pendent purses from the branches, and with the tanagers picnic on mulberries and insects. In the evening, night-hawks dart about on noiseless wing; whippoorwills set up a plaintiff cry that they continue far into the night; and owls revel in moonlight and rich hunting. At dawn, robins wake the echoes of each new day with the admonition, "Cheer up! Cheer up!" and a little later big black vultures go wheeling through cloudland or hang there, like frozen splashes, searching the Limberlost and surrounding country for food. The boom of the bittern resounds all day, and above it the rasping<sup>o</sup> scream of the blue heron, as he strikes terror to the hearts of frogdom; while the occasional cries of a lost loon, strayed from its flock in northern migration, fill the swamp with sounds of wailing.

Flashing through the tree-tops of the Limberlost there are birds whose color is more brilliant than that of the gaudiest flower that lifts its face to the light and air. The lilies of the mire are not so white as the white herons that fish among them. The ripest spray of

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goldenrod is not so highly colored as the burnished gold on the breast of the oriole that rocks on it. The jays are bluer than the calamus bed they wrangle above with throaty chatter. The finches are a finer purple than the ironwort. For every clump of foxfire flaming in the Limberlost, there is a cardinal glowing redder on a bush above it. These may not be more numerous than the other birds, but their brilliant coloring and the fearless disposition that keeps them forever in evidence make them appear so.

The Cardinal was hatched in a thicket of sweet brier and blackberry. His father was a tough old widower of many experiences and variable temper. He was the biggest, most aggressive redbird in the Limberlost, and easily reigned king of his kind. Catbirds, kingbirds, and shrikes gave him a wide berth, and not even the ever quarrelsome jays plucked up enough courage to antagonize him. A few days after his latest bereavement, he saw a fine, plump young female; and she so filled his eye that he gave her no rest until she permitted his caresses, and carried the first twig to the wild rose. She was very proud to mate with the king of the Limberlost; and, if deep down in her heart she felt transient fears of her lordly master, she gave no

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sign, for she was a bird of goodly proportion and fine feather herself.

She chose her location with the eye of an artist, and the judgment of a housewife of much experience. It would be a difficult thing for snakes and squirrels to penetrate the briery thicket. The white berry blossoms had scarcely ceased to attract a swarm of insects before the sweets of the roses recalled them, and, by the time they had faded, luscious big berries ripened within reach and drew the food hunters. She built with far more than ordinary care. It was a beautiful nest, not nearly so loose and shackly as those of her kindred all about the swamp. There was a distinct attempt at a cup shape, and it really was neatly lined with dried blades of sweet marsh grass. But it was in the laying of her first egg that the queen cardinal forever distinguished herself. She was a fine healthy bird, full of love and happiness over her first venture at housekeeping, and she so far surpassed herself on that occasion that she had difficulty in convincing any one that she was responsible for the result.

Indeed, she was compelled to lift beak and wing against her lord in defense of this egg, for it was so unusually large that he could not be persuaded short of



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force that some sneak of the feathered tribe had not crept in and deposited it in her absence. The king felt sure there was something wrong with the egg, and wanted to roll it from the nest; but the queen knew her own, and stoutly battled for its protection. She further distinguished herself by laying three others. After that the king made up his mind that she was a most remarkable bird, and went off pleasure seeking; but the queen settled down to brood, and she did it faithfully and well.

Through all the long days, when the heat became intense, and the king was none too thoughtful of her appetite or comfort, she nestled those four eggs against her breast and patiently waited. The big egg was her treasure. She gave it constant care. Many times in a day she turned it; and always against her breast she felt it with an individual pressure that distinguished it from the rest. It was the first to hatch, of course, and the queen felt that she had enough if all the others failed her; for this first egg pipped with a resounding pip, and, before the silky down was really dry on the big terra-cotta body, the young Cardinal stood on his feet and lustily demanded food.

The king came to see him and at once acknowledged

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subjugation. He was the father of many promising cardinals, yet he had never seen one like this. He set the Limberlost echoes rolling with his jubilant rejoicing. He unceasingly hunted for the ripest berries and the juiciest grubs. He stuffed that baby from morning until night, and never came with food that he did not find him standing atop of the rest of the family calling for more. The queen was just as proud of him and just as foolish in her idolatry, but she kept tally and gave the rest every other worm in turn. They were unusually fine babies, but what chance has a merely fine baby in a family that possesses a prodigy? The Cardinal was as large as any two of the other nestlings, and so red that the very down on him seemed tinged with crimson; his skin and even his feet were red.

He was the first to climb to the edge of the nest and the first out on a limb. He found himself a worm long before his parents expected him to, and winged his first flight to such a distance that his adoring mother almost went into spasms lest his strength should fail, and he should fall into the swamp and become the victim of a hungry old turtle. He landed safely, however; and the king was so pleased he hunted him an unusually ripe berry and, perching in front

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of him, gave him his first language lesson. Of course, the Cardinal knew how to say "Pee" and "Chee" when he burst his shell; but the king taught him to chip with accuracy and expression, and he learned that very day that male birds of the cardinal family always say "Chip," and the females "Chook." In fact, he learned so rapidly and was generally so observant that, before the king thought wise to give him the next lesson, he found him on a limb with closed beak and swelling throat, practising his own rendering of the tribal calls, "Wheat! Wheat! Wheat!" "Here! Here! Here!" and "Cheer! Cheer! Cheer!" This so delighted the king that he whistled them over and over and helped the youngster all he could.

He was so proud of him that this same night he gave him his first lesson in tucking his head properly and going to sleep alone. In a few days more, when he was sure of his wing strength, he gave him instructions in flying. He taught him how to spread his wings and slowly sail from tree to tree; how to fly in short, broken curves, to avoid the aim of a hunter; how to turn abruptly in air and make a quick dash after a bug or an enemy. He taught him the proper angle at which to breast a stiff wind, and that he should always

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meet a storm head first, so that the water would run as the plumage lies.

His first bathing lesson was a pronounced success. The Cardinal took to water like a duck. He bathed, splashed, and romped until his mother was almost crazy for fear he should attract a water-snake or turtle; but the element of fear was left out of his disposition. He learned to dry, dress, and plume his feathers, and showed such remarkable pride in keeping himself immaculate that, although only a youngster, he was already a bird of so great promise, that many of the feathered inhabitants of the Limberlost came to pay him a call.

Next, the king took him on a long trip about the swamp, and taught him how to select the proper places to scratch for worms; how to search under leaves for plant-lice and slugs for meat; which berries were good and safe, and the kind of weeds that bore the most and best seeds. He showed him how to find tiny pebbles to grind his food, and how to sharpen and polish his beak.

Then he took up the real music lessons, and taught him how to whistle and how to warble and trill. "Good Cheer! Good Cheer!" intoned the king.

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“Coo Cher! Coo Cher!” imitated the Cardinal. These songs were only studied repetitions, but there was a depth and volume in his voice that gave promise of future greatness, when age should have developed him, and experience awakened his emotions. He was an excellent musician for a youngster.

He soon did so well in caring for himself, in finding food and in flight, and grew so big and independent, that he made numerous excursions all about the Limberlost alone; and so goodly were his proportions, and so aggressive his manners, that he suffered no molestation. In fact, the reign of the king promised to end speedily; but if he feared it he made no sign, and his pride in his wonderful offspring was always manifest. After the Cardinal had thoroughly explored the swamp, a longing for a wider range grew upon him; and day after day he hung about the borders, looking off across the wide, cultivated fields, almost aching to test his wings in one long, high, wild stretch of flight.

A day came when the heat of late summer set the marsh steaming, and the Cardinal, lingering about the borders, caught the breeze from the upland; and the vision of broad fields stretching away to the north so enticed him that he spread his wings, and, following

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the line of the trees and fences as much as possible, he made his first journey from home. That day was so delightful that it decided his fortunes. It would seem that the swamp, so appreciated by his kindred, ought to have been sufficient for the Cardinal, but it was not. With every mile he winged his flight, came a greater sense of power and strength, and a keener love for the broad sweep of field and forest. His heart bounded with the zest of rocking on the wind, racing through the sunshine and sailing over the great panorama of waving cornfields, meadows, orchards and woodlands.

The heat and closeness of the Limberlost seemed a prison well escaped, as on and on he flew in straight, untiring flight. Crossing a field of half-ripened corn that sloped down to the river, the Cardinal saw many birds feeding there, so he lit on a tall tree to watch them. Soon he decided that he would like to try this new food. He found a place where a crow had left an ear nicely laid open, and, clinging to the husk, as he saw the others do, he stretched to his full height and drove his strong, sharp beak into the creamy grain. After the stifling swamp hunting, after the long, exciting flight, to rock on this swaying corn and drink the rich milk of the grain, was to the Cardinal his first taste

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of nectar and ambrosia. When he came to the golden kernel, he lifted his head, and, chipping it off in tiny specks, he tasted and approved with all the delight of an epicure in a delicious new dish.

Perhaps there were other treats in the next field. He decided to go still farther. But he had flown only a little way when he changed his course and turned to the south, for below him was a long, shining, creeping thing, fringed with willows, while towering above them were giant sycamore, maple, tulip, and elm trees that caught the wind and rocked with it; and the Cardinal did not know what it was. Filled with wonder he dropped lower and lower. Birds were all about it, many flying with it and dipping into it; but its clear, creeping silver was a mystery to the Cardinal.

The beautiful river of poetry and song that the Indians first discovered and, later with the French, named Ouabache, the winding, shining river that Logan and Me-shin-go-me-sia loved, the only river that could tempt Wa-ca-co-nah from the Salamonie and Missis-sinewa, the river beneath whose silver sycamores and giant maples Chief Godfrey traveled many miles to pitch his camp-fires, was never more beautiful than on that perfect autumn day.

## The Song of the Cardinal

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With his feathers plastered tight, the Cardinal lighted on a willow, and leaned to look, quivering with excitement and uttering explosive "chips;" for there he was, face to face with a big redbird that looked neither peaceful nor timid. He uttered an impudent "Chip" of challenge, which, as it left his beak was flung back to him. The Cardinal flared his crest and half lifted his wings, stiffening them at the butt, the bird he was facing did the same. In his surprise he rose to his full height with a dexterous little side step, and the other bird straightened and side-stepped exactly with him. It was too much for the Cardinal. Straining every muscle, he made a dash for the impudent upstart.

He struck the water with such force that it splashed above the willows, and a kingfisher, stationed on a stump opposite him, watching the shoals for minnows, saw it. He spread his beak and bellowed with rattling laughter, until his voice re-echoed from point to point down the river. The Cardinal scarcely knew how he got out, but he had learned a new lesson. That beautiful, shining, creeping thing was water; not thick, tepid, black marsh water, but pure, cool, silver water. He shook his plumage, feeling a degree redder from



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shame, but he would not be laughed into leaving. He found it too delightful. In a little time he ventured down and took a drink, and it was the first real drink of his life. Oh, but it was good !

When thirst from the heat and his long flight was quenched, he ventured in for a bath, and that was a new and delightful experience. How he slashed and splashed, and sent the silvery drops flying ! How he ducked and soaked and cooled in that rippling water, in which he might stay as long as he pleased and splash his fill ; for he could see the bottom for a long distance all about, and could easily avoid anything attempting to harm him. He was so wet when his bath was over, he could scarcely get to a bush to dry and dress his plumage.

Once again in perfect feather, he remembered the bird of the water, and went back to the willow. There in the depths of the shining river the Cardinal discovered himself, and his heart swelled big with just pride. Was that broad, full breast his ? Where had he seen any other cardinal with a crest so high it waved with the wind ? How big and black his eyes were, and his beard was almost as long and crisp as his father's. He spread his wings and gloated on their

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sweep, and twisted and flirted his tail. He went over all his toilet again and dressed every feather on him. He scoured the back of his neck with the butt of his wings, and, tucking his head under them, slowly drew it out time after time to polish his crest. He turned and twisted. He rocked and paraded, and every glimpse he caught of his size and beauty filled him with pride. He strutted like a peacock and chattered like a jay.

When he could find no further points to admire, another fact caught his attention. When he "chipped" there was an answering "Chip" from across the river; certainly there was no cardinal there, so it must be that he was hearing his own voice as well as seeing himself. Selecting a conspicuous perch he sent an incisive "Chip!" across the water, and in kind it came back to him. Then he "chipped" softly and tenderly, as he did in the Limberlost to a favorite little sister that often came and perched beside him in the maple where he slept, and softly and tenderly came the answer. Then the Cardinal understood. "Wheat! Wheat! Wheat!" He whistled it high, and he whistled it low. "Cheer! Cheer! Cheer!" He whistled it tenderly and sharply and imperiously.

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“Here! Here! Here!” At this ringing command, every bird as far as the river carried his voice, came to investigate and remained to admire. Over and over he rang every change he could invent. He made a gallant effort at warbling and trilling, and then, with the gladdest heart he had ever known, he burst into ringing song: “Good Cheer! Good Cheer! Good Cheer!”

As evening came on he grew restless and uneasy, so he slowly winged his way back to the Limberlost; but that day forever spoiled him as a swamp bird. In the night he restlessly ruffled his feathers, and sniffed for the breeze of the meadows. He tasted the corn and the clear water over again. He admired his image in the river, and longed for the sound of his voice, until he began murmuring, “Wheat! Wheat! Wheat!” in his sleep. In the earliest dawn a robin woke him singing, “Cheer up! Cheer up!” and he answered with a sleepy “Cheer! Cheer! Cheer!” A little later the robin sang again with exquisite softness and tenderness, “Cheer up, Dearie! Cheer up, Dearie! Cheer up! Cheer up! Cheer!” The Cardinal, now fully wakened, shouted lustily, “Good Cheer! Good Cheer!” and after that it was only a

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little time until he was on his way to the shining river. It was better than the day before, and every following day found him feasting in the cornfield and bathing in the shining water; but he always went back to his family at nightfall.

When the black frosts began to strip the Limberlost, and food was almost reduced to dry seed, there came a day on which the king marshaled his followers and spoke the magic word. With the dusk he led them southward, mile after mile, until their breath fell short, and their wings ached with unaccustomed flight; but, because of the trips to the river, the Cardinal was stronger than the others, and he easily kept abreast of the king. In the early morning, even before the robins were awake, the king settled in the Everglades. But the Cardinal had lost all liking for swamp life, so he stubbornly set out alone, and in a little time he had found another river. It was not quite so delightful as the shining river; but still it was beautiful, and on its gently sloping bank was an orange orchard. There the Cardinal rested, and found a winter home after his heart's desire.

The next morning, a golden-haired little girl and an old man with snowy locks came hand in hand

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through the orchard. The child saw the Cardinal and immediately claimed him for her bird, and that same day the edict went forth that a very dreadful time was in store for any one who harmed or even frightened the Cardinal. So in security began a series of days that were pure delight. The orchard was alive with insects, attracted by the heavy odors, and slugs infested the bark. Feasting was almost as good as in the Limberlost, and always there was the river to drink from and to splash in at will.

In those days the child and the old man lingered for hours in the orchard, watching the bird which every day seemed to grow bigger and brighter. What a picture his coat, now a bright cardinal red, made against the waxy, green leaves! How big and brilliant he seemed as he raced and darted in play among the creamy blossoms! How the little girl stood with clasped hands worshipping him as, with swelling throat, he rocked on the highest spray and sang his inspiring chorus over and over, "Good Cheer! Good Cheer!" Every day they came to watch and listen. They scattered crumbs; and the Cardinal grew so friendly that he greeted their coming with a quick "Chip! Chip!" while the delighted child tried to repeat it after him.

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Soon they were such friends that when he saw them approaching he would softly call "Chip! Chip!" and then with beady eyes and tilted head await her reply.

Sometimes a member of his family from the Everglades found his way into the orchard, and the Cardinal, having grown to feel a sense of proprietorship, resented the intrusion and went after him like a streak of flame. Whenever any straggler had this experience, he returned to the swamp realizing that the cardinal of the orange orchard was almost twice his size and strength, and so startlingly red as to be a wonder.

One day a gentle breeze from the north sprang up and stirred the orange branches, wafting the heavy perfume across the land and out to sea, and spread in its stead a cool, delicate, pungent odor. The Cardinal lifted his head and whistled an inquiring note. He thought he was mistaken, and went on searching for slugs, and predicting happiness in full, round notes, "Good Cheer! Good Cheer!" Again that odor swept the orchard, so strong that this time there was no mistaking it. The Cardinal darted to the topmost branch, his crest flaring, his tail twitching nervously. "Chip! Chip!" he cried with excited insistence, "Chip! Chip!"

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The breeze was coming stiffly and steadily now, unlike anything the Cardinal had ever known, for its cool breath told of ice-bound fields breaking up under the sun. Its damp touch was from the spring showers washing the face of the northland. Its subtile odor was the commingling of myriads of unfolding leaves and crisp plants, upspringing; its pungent perfume was the pollen of catkins.

Up in the land of the Limberlost, old Mother Nature, with strident muttering, had set about her annual house-cleaning. With her efficient broom, the March wind, she was sweeping every nook and cranny clean. With her scrub-bucket overflowing with April showers, she was washing the face of all creation, and, if these measures failed to produce cleanliness to her satisfaction, she gave a final polish with storms of hail. The shining river was full to overflowing, breaking up the ice and carrying a load of refuse, it went rolling out to the sea. The ice and snow were not altogether gone; but the long-pregnant earth was mothering her children. She cringed at every step, for the ground was teeming with life. Bug and worm were working up to the light and warmth. Thrusting aside the mold and leaves above them, springing beauties, hepaticas, and violets

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lifted tender, golden-green heads. The sap was flowing, and leafless trees were covered with swelling buds. Delicate mosses were creeping over every stick of decaying timber. The lichens on stone and fence were freshly painted in unending varieties of gray and green. Myriads of flowers and vines were springing up to cover last year's decaying leaves. "The beautiful uncut hair of graves" was creeping over meadow, spreading along roadside, and covering every naked spot.

The Limberlost was waking to life even ahead of the fields and the river. Through the winter it had been the barest and dreariest of places; but now the earliest signs of returning spring were in its martial music, for when the green hyla pipes, and the bullfrog drums, the bird voices soon join them. Its catkins bloomed first; and then, in an incredibly short time, flags, rushes, and vines were like a sea of waving green, and swelling buds were ready to burst. Out in the upland the smoke was curling over sugar-camp and clearing; in the forests the animals were waking from their long sleep; the shad were starting anew their never-ending journey up the shining river; peeps of green were mantling hilltop and valley; and the northland was



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ready for its dearest springtime treasures to come home again.

From overhead were ringing those first glad notes, caught nearer the Throne than those of any other bird, "Spring o' the year! Spring o' the year!"; and stilt-legged little killdeers were scudding about the Limberlost and along the river, and flinging from cloud-land their "Kill deer! Kill deer!" call. The robins in the orchards were pulling the long, dried blades of last year's grass from under the snow to line their mud-walled cup; and the bluebirds were at the hollow apple tree. Flat on the top rail, the doves were gathering their few coarse sticks and twigs together. It was such a splendid place to set their cradle. The weather-beaten, rotting old rails were the very color of the little dove mother. Her red-rimmed eye fitted into the background like a tiny scarlet lichen cup. Surely no one would ever see her! The Limberlost and the shining river, the fields and forests, the wayside bushes and fences, the stumps, the logs, the hollow trees, even the bare, brown breast of Mother Earth, were all waiting to cradle their own again; and by one of the untold miracles each would return to its own.

## The Song of the Cardinal

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There was intoxication in the air. The subtile, pungent, ravishing odors on the wind, of unfolding leaves, ice-water washed plants, and catkin pollen, were an elixir to humanity. The cattle of the field were fairly drunk with it, and herds, dry-fed during the winter, were coming to their first grazing with heads thrown high, romping, bellowing, and racing like wild things.

And the north wind sweeping down from icy fastnesses, caught this odor of spring, and swept it on to the orange orchards and Everglades; and at a breath of it, crazed with excitement, the Cardinal went flaming about the orchard, for, with no one to teach him, he knew what it meant. The call had come. Holidays were over.

It was time to go home, time to riot in crisp freshness, time to go courting, time to make love, time to possess his own, time for mating and nest building. All that day he flashed about, nervous with dread of the unknown, and palpitant with delightful expectation; but with the coming of the dusk he began his journey northward.

When he passed the Everglades, he winged his way slowly, and repeatedly sent down a challenging



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## The Song of the Cardinal

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“Chip,” but there came no answer. And then the Cardinal knew that the north wind had carried a true message, for the king and his followers were ahead of him on their way to the Limberlost. Mile after mile, a thing of pulsing fire, he breasted the blue-black night, and it was not so very long until he could discern a flickering patch of darkness sweeping the sky ahead of him. The Cardinal flew steadily in a straight sweep, until, with a throb of triumph in his heart, he rose in his course, and from far overhead, flung down a boastful challenge to the king and his followers, as he sailed over them and was lost from sight.

It was still dusky with the darkness of night when he crossed the Limberlost, dropping low enough to see its branches laid bare, to catch a gleam of green in its swelling buds, and to hear the wavering chorus of its frogs. But there was no hesitation in his flight. Straight and sure he winged his way toward the shining river; and it was only a few more miles until the rolling waters of its springtime flood caught his eye. Dropping precipitately, he plunged his burning beak into its beloved water, and then he flew up into a fine old stag sumac and tucked his head under his wing for a little rest. He had made the flight of a thousand

## The Song of the Cardinal

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miles in one unbroken sweep, and he was sleepy. In utter content he ruffled his feathers and closed his eyes, for he was beside the shining river; and it would be another season before the orange orchard would ring again with his “Good Cheer! Good Cheer!”





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*"Wet year! Wet year!" prophesied the Cardinal*



The sumac seemed to fill his idea of a perfect location from the very first. He perched on a limb, and between dressing his plumage and pecking at last year's sour, dried berries, he sent abroad his prediction. Old Mother Nature verified his wisdom by sending a dashing shower, but he cared not at all for a

wetting. He knew how to turn his crimson suit into the most perfect of water-proof coats; so he flattened his crest, sleeked his feathers, and, breasting the April downpour, kept on calling for rain. He knew he would look all the brighter when it was past, and he seemed to know, too, that every day of sunshine and shower would bring nearer his heart's desire.

## The Song of the Cardinal

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He was a very Beau Brummel while he waited. From morning until night he bathed, dressed his feathers, sunned himself, fluffed and flirted. He strutted and "chipped" incessantly. He claimed that sumac for his very own, and stoutly battled for possession with many intruders. It grew on a thickly wooded slope, and the shining river went singing between grassy banks, whitened with spring beauties, beneath it. Crowded about it were thickets of papaw, wild grapevines, thorn, dogwood, and red haw, which attracted bug and insect; and just across the old snake fence was a field of mellow mold sloping down to the river, that would soon be plowed for corn, turning out numberless big, fat grubs.

He was compelled to wage almost hourly battles for his location, for there was something fine about the old stag sumac that attracted homestead seekers. A sober pair of robins began laying their foundations there the morning the Cardinal arrived, and a couple of blackbirds tried to take possession before the day was over. He had little trouble with the robins. They were easily conquered, and settled a rod up the bank in a wild plum tree with but small protest; but the air was thick with chips, chatter, and red and black feathers,

## The Song of the Cardinal

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before the blackbirds acknowledged defeat. They were old-timers, and knew about the grubs and the young corn; but they also knew when they were beaten, so they moved down stream to a scrub oak, trying to assure each other that it was the place they had really wanted from the first.

The Cardinal was left boasting and strutting about the sumac, but in his heart he found it pretty lonesome business. Being the son of a king, he was much too dignified to go about begging for a mate, and, besides, it took all his time to guard the sumac; but his eyes were wide open to all that went on about him, and he envied the blackbird his glossy, devoted little sweetheart with all his might. He almost strained his voice trying to rival the love-song of a skylark that hung among the clouds above a meadow across the river, and poured down to his mate a story of adoring love and sympathy. He screamed a "Chip" of such savage jealousy at a pair of killdeer lovers that he sent them scampering down the river bank without knowing that the crime of which they stood convicted was that of being mated when he was not. And as for the doves that were already brooding on the line fence under the maples, the Cardinal was torn between two opinions.

## The Song of the Cardinal

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He was alone, he was love-sick, and he was holding the finest building lot along the shining river for his mate, and her slowness in coming made their devotion very hard to bear when he so coveted a little love; but it seemed to the Cardinal that he never could so forget himself as to emulate the example of that dove lover. The dove had no dignity; he was so effusive he was a nuisance. He kept his little Quaker lady stuffed to discomfort; he clung to the side of the nest trying to brood with her until he almost crowded her off her eggs. He pestered her with caresses and cooed over his love-song until every chipmunk along the line fence was familiar with his story. The Cardinal's nerves were worn to such a fine edge that he darted at him one day and pulled a big tuft of feathers out of his back. Thinking it over when he had returned to the sumac, he was compelled to admit that his anger lay quite as much in that he had no one to love as because the dove was disgustingly devoted.

Every morning brought new arrivals,—trim little maids fresh from their long holiday, and big boastful beaus looking their brightest and bravest, each singer almost splitting his throat in the effort to captivate the

## The Song of the Cardinal

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mate he coveted. They came flashing down the river bank, like rockets of scarlet, gold, blue, and black; rocking on the willows, splashing in the water, bursting into jets of melody, making every possible display of their beauty and music; and at times fighting like young captains when they discovered that the little sweethearts they were wooing favored their rivals and desired only to be a sister to them.

The heart of the Cardinal sank as he watched his kindred and friends. There was not a member of his immediate family among them. He pitied himself as he wondered if fate had in store for him the trials he saw others suffering. Those dreadful little feathered women! How they coquetted! How they flirted! How they sleeked and flattened their plumage, and with half-open beaks and sparkling eyes, hopped nearer and nearer as if charmed. And the eager singers, with swelling throats, sang and sang in a very frenzy of extravagant pleading, but, just when they felt sure their little loves were on the point of surrender, a rod away over the bushes would go streaks of feathers, and there was nothing left to do but swallow the bitter disappointment, follow them up, and begin all over again. For the past three days the Cardinal had been

## The Song of the Cardinal

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watching his cousin, rose-breasted Grosbeak, make violent love to the most exquisite little lady, who apparently encouraged his advances, only in the end to see him left sitting as blue and disconsolate as any human lover, when he discovers that the maid that has coquetted with him for a season belongs to another man.

The Cardinal flew to the very top of the highest sycamore and looked off across country toward the Limberlost. Should he go there seeking a swamp mate among his kindred? It was not an endurable thought. To be sure, matters were getting serious. No bird along the shining river had plumed, paraded, or made more music than he. Was it all to be wasted? By this time he had confidently expected results. Only that morning he had swelled with pride as he heard Mrs. Jay tell her quarrelsome husband that she wished she could exchange him for the Cardinal. And did not the gentle dove pause by the sumac, when she left brooding to take her morning dip in the dust, and gaze at him with unconcealed admiration? No doubt she devoutly wished her plain, pudgy husband wore a scarlet coat. But it is praise from one's own sex that is praise indeed, and only an hour ago, with his own ears, he heard the lark say that from his lookout above

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cloud he saw no other singer anywhere so splendid as the cardinal of the sumac. Because of these things he held fast to his opinion that he was a prince indeed; and he decided to remain in his chosen location and with his physical and vocal attractions compel the finest little cardinal maid in the woods to seek him.

He planned it all very carefully. How she would hear his splendid music and come to take a peep at him; how she would be smitten with his size and beauty; how she would timidly come, but come of course for his approval; how he would condescend to accept her if she pleased him in all particulars; how she would be devoted to him; and how she would approve his choice of a home, for the sumac was in a lovely spot for scenery, as well as housekeeping. For several days he had boasted, he had bantered, he had challenged, he had on this last day almost condescended to coaxing, but not one little bright-eyed cardinal lady had come to offer herself.

The performance of a brown thrush set him wild with envy. The thrush came gliding up the river bank, a rusty-coated, sneaking thing of the underbrush, and, taking possession of a thorn bush just across from the sumac, he sang for an hour in the

## The Song of the Cardinal

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open. There was no discounting that song. It was woven fresh from the warp and woof of his fancy. It was a song so filled with the joy and gladness of spring, a song so thrilled with love's pleading and passion's tender, pulsing pain that at its close there were a half-dozen admiring thrush-ladies gathered about. With care and deliberation the brown thrush selected the belle, and she followed him off to the thicket as if charmed.

It was the Cardinal's dream materialized for another before his very eyes, and it made him sick with envy. If that plain brown bird that slinked as if he had a theft to account for, could, by showing himself and singing for an hour, win a mate, why should not he, the most gorgeous bird of the woods, openly flaunting his charms and discoursing his music, have at least equal success? Should he, the proudest, most magnificent of cardinals, be compelled to go about seeking a mate like any common bird? Perish the thought!

He went down to the river to bathe. He hunted a spot where the water flowed crystal clear over a bed of white limestone, and there he washed until he felt that he could get no cleaner. Then he went up to his favorite sun-parlor, and stretching on a limb, he





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## The Song of the Cardinal

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stood his feathers on end, and sunned, fluffed and prinked until he was immaculate.

On the tiptop antler of the old stag sumac, he perched and strained until his jetty whiskers looked stubby. He poured out a tumultuous cry vibrant with every passion raging in him. He caught up his own rolling echoes and changed and varied them. He improvised, and set the shining river ringing, "Wet year! Wet year!"

He whistled and whistled until all birdland and even mankind heard, for the farmer paused at his kitchen door, with his pails of foaming milk, and called to his wife:

"Hear that, Marier! Jest hear it! I swanny, if that bird don't stop predictin' wet weather, I'll git so skeered I won't durst put in my corn afore June. They's some birds like killdeers an' bob-whites 'at kin make things purty plain, but I never heerd no bird 'at could jest speak words out clear an' distinct like that feller. Seems to come frum down along the river bottom. B'lieve I'll jest step down that way an' see if the lower field is ready fer the plow yit."

"Abram Johnson," said his wife, "bein's you set up fer an honest man, if you want to traipse through slush

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an' drizzle a half-mile to see a bird, why, say so, but don't, fer land's sake, lay it onto plowin' 'at you know in all conscience won't be ready fer a week yit 'thout pretendin' to look."

Abram grinned sheepishly. "I'm willin' to call it the bird if you air, Marier. I've been hearin' him frum the barn all day, an' there's somethin' kind o' human in his notes 'at takes me jest a leetle diffrunt frum any other bird I ever noticed. I'm reely curious to set eyes on him. Seemed to me frum his singin' out to the barn, it 'ud be mighty nigh like meetin' folks."

"Bosh!" exclaimed Maria, "I don't spose he sings a mite better 'an any other bird. It's jest the old Wabash a-rollin' up the echoes. A bird singin' long the river always sounds twict as fine as one on the hills. I've knowed that fer forty year. Chances air 'at he'll be gone 'fore you git there."

As Abram opened the door, "Wet year! Wet year!" pealed the flaming prophet.

He went out, closing the door softly and, with an utter disregard for the cornfield, made a bee line for the musician.

"I dunno as this is any the best fer twinges o' rheumatiz," he muttered, as he turned up his collar

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and drew his old hat lower to keep the splashing drops out of his face. "I don't jest rightly spose I ort to go; but I'm free to admit I'd as lief be dead as not to go when I git a call, an' the fact is, I'm *called* down along the river."

"Wet year! Wet year!" rolled the Cardinal's prediction.

"Thanky, ole feller! Glad to hear you! Didn't jest need the information, but I got my bearin's rightly frum it! I kin jest about pick out yer bush, an' it's well along towards evenin', too, an' must be mighty nigh yer bed time. Looks like you might be stayin' round these parts! I'd like it powerful well if you'd settle right here, say 'bout where you air. An' where air you anyhow?"

Abram went peering and dodging along the fence, peeping into the bushes, searching for the bird. Suddenly there was a whir of wings and a streak of crimson.

"Skeert you into the next county, I s'pose," he muttered.

But it came nearer being a scared man than a frightened bird, for the Cardinal flashed straight toward him until only a few yards away, and then, swaying on a bush, it chipped, cheered, peeked, whistled broken

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notes, and manifested perfect delight at the sight of the white-haired old man. Abram stared in astonishment.

“Lord A’mighty!” he gasped. “Big as a black-bird, red as a live coal, an’ a-comin’ right at me. Yer somebody’s pet, that’s what you air! An’ no, you haint neither. Settin’ on a sawed stick in a little wire house takes all the ginger outen any bird, an’ their feathers is always mussy. Inside o’ no cage never saw you, fer they ain’t a feather out o’ place on you. Yer finer’n a piece o’ red satin. An’ you got that way o’ swingin’ an’ dancin’ an’ high steppin’ right out in God A’mighty’s big woods, a teeterin’ in the wind, an’ a dartin’ ’cross the water. \* Cage never tetched you! But yer somebody’s pet jest the same. An’ I look like the man, an’ yer tryin’ to tell me so, by gum!”

The Cardinal leaned toward Abram, and turned his head from side to side, and peered, “chipped,” and waited for an answering “Chip” from a little golden-haired child, but there was no way for Abram to know that.

“It’s jest as sure as fate,” he said. “You think you know me, an’ yer tryin’ to tell me somethin’. Wish to land I knowed what you want! Air you tryin’ to tell

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me 'Howdy?' Well, I don't 'low nobody to be politer 'an I am, so fer as I know."

Abram lifted his old hat, and the raindrops glistened on his white hair. He squared his shoulders and stood very erect.

"Howdy, Mr. Redbird? How d'ye find yerself this evenin'? I don't jest riccolict ever seein' you before, but I'll never meet you agin 'thout knowin' you. When d'you arrive? Come through by the special midnight flyer, did you? Well you never was more welcome any place in yer life. I'd give a right smart sum this minnit if you'd say you come to settle on this river bank. How d'ye like it? To my mind it's jest as near Paradise as you'll strike on airth.

"Old Wabash is a twister for curvin' and windin' round, an' it's limestone bed half the way, an' the water's as purty an' clear as in Marier's spring-house. An' as fer trimmin', why say, Mr. Redbird, I'll jest leave it to you if she ain't all trimmed up like a woman's spring bunnit. Look at the grass a-creepin' right down till it's a trailin' in the water. Did you ever see jest quite sich fine, fringy willers? An' you wait a little, an' the flowerin' mallows 'at grows long the shinin' old river is fine as garden hollyhocks.

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Marier says 'at they'd be purtier 'an hern if they was only double ; but, Lord, Mr. Redbird, they air ! See 'em onct on the bank, an' agin in the water ! An' back a leetle an' there's jest thicketts of papaw, an' thorns, an' wild grape-vines, an' crab, an' red an' black haw, an' dogwood, an' sumac, an' spicebush, an' trees ! Lord ! Mr. Redbird, the sycamores, an' maples, an' tulip, an' ash, an' elm trees air so bustin' fine 'long the old Wabash they put 'em into poetry books an' sing songs about 'em. What do you think o' that? Jest back o' you a leetle, there's a sycamore split into five trunks, any one o' them a famous big tree, tops up 'mong the clouds, an' roots a diggin' under the old river; an' over a leetle further 's a maple 'at's eight big trees in one. Most anything you kin name, you kin find it 'long this ole Wabash, if you only know where to hunt fer it.

"They's mighty few white men takes the trouble to look, but the Indians uster know. Uster come canoe-in' an' fishin' down the river an' camp under these very trees, an' Ma 'ud git so mad at the ole squaws. Settlers wusn't so thick then, an' you had to be mighty keerful not to rile 'em, an' they'd come a-traipsin' with their wild berries. Woods full o' berries! Anybody



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could git 'em by the bushel fer the pickin', an' we hadn't got onto raisin' much wheat, an' had to carry it on horses over into Ohio to git it milled. Took Pa five days to make the trip; an' then the blame ole squaws 'ud come, an' Ma 'ud be compelled to hand 'em over her big white loaves. Jest about set her plum crazy. Uster git up in the night, an' fix her yeast, an' bake, an' let the oven cool off, an' hide the bread out in the wheat bin, an' git the smell of it all out o' the house by good daylight, so's 'at she could say they wusn't a loaf in the cabin. Oh! if its good pickin' you're after, they's berries fer all creation 'long the river yit; an' jest wait a few days till old Aprile gits done showerin' an' I plow this cornfield!"

Abram set a foot on the third rail and leaned his elbows on the top. The Cardinal chipped delightedly and hopped and tilted closer.

"I hadn't jest 'lowed all winter I'd tackle this field agin. I've turned it every spring fer forty year. Bought it when I was a young feller, jest married to Marier. Took a big debt on it; but I wus alw'ys in love with these slopin' fields, an' my sheer of this ole Wabash hain't been fer sale ner tradin' any time this past forty year. I've hung onto it like grim death,

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fer it's jest that much o' Paradise I'm plum sure on. First time I plowed this field, Mr. Redbird, I only hit the high places. Jest married Marier, an' I didn't tech airth any too frequent all that summer. I've plowed it every year since, an' I've been 'lowin' all this winter, when the rheumatiz was a gittin' in its work, 'at I'd give it up this spring an' turn it to medder; but I dunno. Onct I got started, b'lieve I could go it all right an' not feel it so much, if you'd stay to cheer a feller up a leetle an' post him on the weather. Hate the doggondest to own I'm worsted, an' if you'll say it's a stay, b'lieve I'll try it. Very sight o' you kinder warms the cockles o' my heart all up, an' every skip you take sets me a wantin' to be jumpin' too.

“What on airth air you a-lookin' fer? Man! I b'lieve it's grub! Somebody's been feedin' you! An' you want me to keep it up? Well, you struck it all right, Mr. Redbird. Feed you? You bet I will! You needn't even rastle fer grubs if you don't want to. Like as not yer feelin' hungry right now, pickin' bein' so slim these airly days. Land's sake! I hope you don't feel you've come too soon. I'll fetch you everything on the place it's likely a redbird ever teched, airly in the mornin' if you'll say you'll stay an' wave

## The Song of the Cardinal

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yer torch 'long my river bank this summer. I ain't a scrap about me now. Yes I hev too! Here's a handful o' corn I wus takin' to the banty rooster; but shucks! he's fat as a young shoat now. Corn's a leetle big an' hard fer you. Mebby I can split it up a mite."

Abram took out his jack-knife, and, dotting a row of grains along the top rail, he split and shaved them down as fine as possible; and, as he reached one end of the rail, the Cardinal, with a spasmodic "Chip!" dashed down and snatched a particle from the other, and flashed back to the bush, testing, approving, and chipping his thanks.

"Pshaw! now," said Abram, staring wide-eyed. "Don't that beat you? So you reely air a pet? Best kind of a pet in the hull world, too! Makin' everybody 'at sees you happy, an' havin' some chanst to be happy yerself. An' I look like yer friend? Well! Well! I'm monstrous willin' to adopt you if you'll take me; an', as fer feedin', from to-morry on I'll find time to set yer little table 'long this same rail every day. I s'pose Marier 'ull say 'at I'm gone plum crazy; but, fer that matter, if I ever git her down to see you jest once, the trick's done with her, too, fer you're the purtiest thing God ever made in the shape of a bird, 'at I ever

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saw. Look at that topknot a wavin' in the wind! Mebby praise to the face is open disgrace; but I'll take yer sheer an' mine, too, an' tell you right here an' now 'at you're the blambdest purtiest thing 'at I ever saw.

“But, Lord! You ortn't be so keerless! Don't you know you hain't nothin' but jest a target? Why don't you keep out o' sight a leetle? You come a-shinneyin' up to nine out o' ten men 'long the river like this, an' yer purty, coaxin', palaverin' way won't save a feather on ye. You'll git the leetle red heart shot plum ouden yer leetle red body, an' that's what you'll git. It's a dratted shame! An' there's law to protect you, too. They's a good big fine fer killin' sech as you, but nobody seems to push it. Every fool wants to test his aim, an' you're the brightest thing on the river bank fer a mark.

“Well, if you'll stay right where you air, it 'ull be a sorry day fer any cuss 'at teches you; 'at I'll promise you, Mr. Redbird. This land's mine, an' if you locate on it, you're mine till time to go back to that other old feller 'at looks like me. Wonder if he's any willinger to feed you an' stand up fer you 'an I be?”

“Here! Here! Here!” whistled the Cardinal.

## The Song of the Cardinal

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“Well, I’m mighty glad if you’re sayin’ you’ll stay! Guess it will be all right if you don’t git stuck on some o’ them Limberlost hens an’ tole off to the swamp. Lord! the Limberlost ain’t to be compared with the river, Mr. Redbird. You’re foolish if you go! Talkin’ ’bout goin’, I must be goin’ myself, ur Marier ’ull be comin’ down the line fence with the lantern; an’, come to think of it, I’m a leetle moist, not to say down-right damp. But then you *warned* me, didn’t you, old feller? Well, I told Marier seein’ you ’ud be like meetin’ folks, an’ it has been. Good deal more’n I counted on, an’ I’ve talked more’n I hev in a hull year. Hardly think now ’at I’ve the reputation o’ bein’ a mighty quiet feller, would ye?”

Abram straightened up and touched his hat brim in a trim little military salute. “Well, good by, Mr. Redbird. Never had more pleasure meetin’ anybody in my life ’cept first time I met Marier. You think about the plowin’, an’, if you say ‘stay’, it’s a go! Good by; an’ do be a leetle more keerful o’ yerself. See you in the mornin’, right after breakfast, no count takin’ o’ the weather.”

“Wet year! Wet year!” called the Cardinal after his retreating figure.

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Abram turned and gravely saluted the second time. The Cardinal went down to the top rail and feasted on the sweet grains of corn until his craw was full, and then tucked up in the sumac and went to sleep. Early the next morning he was about and in fine toilet, and with a full voice from the top of the sumac greeted the day—"Wet year! Wet year!"

Away off down the river echoed his voice until it so nearly resembled some member of his family replying that he followed, searching the banks mile after mile on either side, until at last he really heard voices of his kind. He went to them, but it was only several staid old couples, a long time mated, and busy with their housekeeping. The Cardinal went back to the sumac, feeling just a little lonelier than ever.

He decided to prospect in the other direction, and, taking wing, he started up the river. Following the channel, he winged his flight for miles between the tangle of foliage bordering the banks and above the cool, sparkling water. When he came to the great, cumbrous structures of wood with which men had bridged the river, where the shuffling feet of tired farm horses raised clouds of dust and set the echoes rolling with their thunderous hoof-beats, he was afraid; and,

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rising high, he sailed out over them in short, broken curves of flight. But where giant maple and ash, leaning, locked branches across the channel in one of old Mother Nature's bridges for the squirrels, he knew no fear, and dipped so low beneath them that his image trailed a wavering shadow along the silver path he followed.

He rounded curve after curve, and, frequently stopping on a conspicuous perch, flung a ringing challenge in the face of the morning. With every mile his silvery path grew more beautiful. The river bed was limestone, and the swiftly flowing water clear and limpid. The banks were sheer in some places, gently sloping in others, and always thick with a tangle of foliage.

At an abrupt curve in the river he mounted to the summit of a big ash and made boastful prophecy, "Wet year! Wet year!" and on all sides there sprang up the voices of his kind. Startled, the Cardinal took wing. He followed the river in a circling flight until he remembered that here might be the opportunity to win the river mate he coveted, and, winging slower to select a conspicuous perch on which to display his charms, he discovered himself only a few yards from

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the ash from which he had made his prediction. The Cardinal cut across the narrow neck and sent a second call, and, without awaiting a reply, for the second time he flashed up the river and circled Horseshoe Bend. When he came to the same ash for the third time, he understood.

The river swept around in one great curve. The Cardinal mounted to the tiptop limb of the ash and looked about him. There was never a fairer sight for the eye of man or bird. The mist and shimmer of early spring were in the air. The Wabash swept Horseshoe Bend in a silver circle, rimmed by a tangle of foliage bordering both of its banks; and inside it lay a low, open space covered with waving marsh grass and the blue bloom of sweet calamus. Scattered about were mighty trees, but conspicuous above any, in the very center, was a giant sycamore, split at its base into three mighty trees, whose waving branches seemed to sweep the face of heaven, and whose roots like miserly fingers clutched deep into the black muck of Rainbow Bottom.

It was in this lovely spot that the rainbow at last materialized, and at its base, free to all humanity that cared to seek, the Great Alchemist had left his rarest







## The Song of the Cardinal

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treasures—the gold of sunshine, diamond water drops, emerald foliage, and sapphire sky. And, for good measure, there were added seeds, berries, and insects for the birds; and wild flowers, fruit, and nuts for the children. Above it all, the sycamore waved its majestic head.

It made a throne that seemed fit for the son of the king; and mounting to its topmost branch, for miles the river carried his challenge: “Ho, cardinal ladies! Look this way! Behold me! Have you seen any other of so great size? Have you any to equal my grace? Who can whistle so loud, so clear, so compelling a note? Who will fly to me for protection? Who will come and be my mate?”

He flared his crest high, swelled his throat with rolling notes, and looked so big and brilliant that among the many cardinals that had gathered to hear, there was not one to compare with him.

Black envy filled their hearts. Who was this flaming, dashing stranger, flaunting himself in the face of their women folk? There were many unmated females in Rainbow Bottom, and many jealous lovers. A second time the Cardinal, rocking and flashing, proclaimed himself; and there was a murmur of feminine approval so strong that he caught it. Tilting on a

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twig, his crest flared to full height, his throat swelled to bursting, his heart too big for his body, the Cardinal shouted his challenge for the third time; when clear and sharp rose a cry in answer, "Here! Here! Here!" It came from a female that had accepted the caresses of the biggest cardinal in the Rainbow Bottom only the day before, and had spent the morning carrying twigs to a thicket of red haws.

The Cardinal, with a royal flourish, sprang in air to seek her; but her outraged lord was before him, and with a scream she fled, leaving a tuft of feathers in her husband's beak. In turn the Cardinal struck him like a flashing rocket, and then red war raged in Rainbow Bottom. The females scattered for cover with all their might. In one dash the Cardinal worked in a kiss on one poor little thing, too frightened to get out of his way; and then the males closed in on him, and serious business began. The Cardinal would have vastly enjoyed a fight with two or three opponents, but a half-dozen made discretion better than valor. He darted among them, scattering them right and left, and made for the sycamore. With all the breath he had left, he insolently repeated his challenge; and then headed down stream for the sumac with what grace he could command.

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There was an hour of angry recrimination before sweet peace brooded again in Rainbow Bottom. The newly wedded pair finally made it up; and the maids speedily resumed their coquetting, and forgot the handsome stranger—all save the poor little one that had been kissed by accident. She never had been kissed before, and never had expected that she would be, for she was a little creature of many misfortunes.

She had been hatched from a fifth egg to begin with; and everybody knows the misfortune of beginning life with four sturdy older birds on top of one. It was a meager little egg, and a feeble baby that pipped its shell. The rest of the family stood up and took nearly all the food so that she almost starved in the nest, and she never really knew the luxury of a hearty meal until the two eldest had flown. That lasted only a few days; for the others went then, and their parents followed them so far afield that the poor little soul, clamoring alone in the nest, almost perished. Hunger-driven, she climbed to the edge and exercised her wings until she managed some sort of flight to a neighboring bush. She missed the twig and fell to the ground, where she lay cold and shivering.

She cried pitifully, and was nearly dead when a

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brown-faced, barefoot boy, with a fish pole on his shoulder, came by and heard her.

“Poor little thing, you are about dead,” he said. “I know what I’ll do with you. I’ll just take you over and set you in the bushes where I heard those other redbirds, and then your mammy will feed you.”

The boy turned back and carefully set her on a limb close to one of her brothers, and there she got just enough food to keep her alive.

And so her troubles went on. Once a squirrel chased her, and she only saved herself by crowding into a hole so small that the squirrel could not follow. The only reason she escaped a big blue racer when she went down for her first bath was, that a hawk had his eye on the snake and snapped it up at just the proper moment to save the poor quivering little bird. But she was so badly frightened that she could not move for a long time.

All the tribulations of birdland fell to her lot. She was too frail and weak to keep up with her family in migration, and followed with some strangers that were none too kind. Life in the south had been full of trouble. Once a bullet grazed her so closely that she lost two of her wing quills, and that made her more timid than ever. Coming north, she had given out

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again and had finally wandered into the Rainbow Bottom, a tired little stray.

She was such a shy, fearsome little body, the females all flouted her; and the males never seemed to notice that there was material in her for a very fine mate. Every other cardinal lady in the Rainbow Bottom had several lovers courting her, but this poor little frightened lonely maid had never a sweetheart; and she needed love so badly! No one had ever dreamed of seeking her, and now she had been kissed by this magnificent stranger!

Of course, she knew it really wasn't her kiss. He had meant it for the bold creature that had answered his challenge, but since it came to her, it was hers, in a way, after all. And she hid in the underbrush for the rest of the day, and was never so frightened in all her life. She brooded over it constantly, and morning found her at the down curve of the horseshoe, straining her ears for the rarest note she had ever heard. All day she hid and waited, and the next, and the next, but he never came again.

So, one day, possessed by a courage she did not know was hers and filled with a longing that drove her against her will, she set off down the river. For miles she sneaked through the underbrush, and watched

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and listened ; till at last night came, and she went back to the Rainbow Bottom. The next morning she set out early and flew to the spot from which she had turned back the night before. From there on she glided through the bushes and underbrush, trembling and quaking, yet pushing stoutly onward, straining her ears for some note of the brilliant stranger's.

It was mid-forenoon when she reached the region of the sumac, and as she crept warily along, only a little way from her, full and splendid, there burst the voice of the singer for whom she was searching. She shot into the air and fled a mile before she realized that she was flying. Then she stopped and listened, and, rolling with the river, she heard those bold, true tones. Close to the earth, she crept back again, to see if, unobserved, she could find a place where she might gloat her fill on the stranger that had kissed her. When at last she reached a place where she could plainly see him, his beauty was so bewildering, and his song so enticing that she gradually crept nearer and nearer without knowing she was moving.

High in the sumac the Cardinal had sung until his throat was parched, and the fountain of hope was well-nigh dried up. There was nothing but defeat from over-



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whelming numbers in Rainbow Bottom. He had paraded, and had made all the music he had ever been taught, and had improvised a great deal more. Yet no one had come to seek him. Was it of necessity to be the Limberlost, then? This one day more he would stick to his dignity and to the sumac. He tipped, and tilted, and flirted. He whistled, and sang, and trilled. Out over the lowland and up and down the shining river, ringing in every change he could invent, he sent for the last time his prophetic message, "Wet year! Wet year!"







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*“Come here! Come here!” entreated the Cardinal*



He felt that his music was not up to his standard as he burst into this new song. He was almost discouraged. No way seemed open to him but the path to the Limberlost, and he so disdained the swamp that love-making would lose something of its greatest charm if he were driven there for a mate. The time seemed

ripe for stringent measures, and the Cardinal was ready to take them; but how could he stringently urge a little sweetheart that would not come for his utmost endeavor? He listlessly pecked at the berries and flung abroad an inquiring “Chip!” With just an atom of hope, he frequently mounted to his choir-loft and issued an order that savored far more of a plea,

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“Come here! Come here!” and then, leaning, he listened intently to the voice of the river, lest he fail to catch it if it bore the faintest responsive “Chook!”

He could hear the sniffling of the carp wallowing all along the bank. A big pickerel slashed about, breakfasting on minnows. Across from the sumac, the black bass, with gamy spring, snapped up, before it struck the water, every luckless, honey-laden insect that fell from the feast of sweets in a blossom-whitened wild crab. The sharp bark of the red squirrel and the low of cattle lazily chewing the cud among the willows came to him. The hammering of a woodpecker on a dead sycamore, a little above him, rolled down to his straining ears like a drum beat.

The Cardinal hated the woodpecker more than he hated the dove. The dove was only foolishly effusive, but the woodpecker was a veritable Bluebeard. The Cardinal longed to pull the feathers from his back until it was as red as his head, for the woodpecker had dressed his suit in finest style, and with dulcet tones and melting tenderness had gone a-courting. Sweet as the dove's had been his wooing, and one more pang the lonely Cardinal had suffered at being forced to witness his felicity; yet, scarcely had his plump, amiable

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little lady consented to his caresses and approved the sycamore, before he turned on her, pecked her severely, and pulled a tuft of plumage from her breast. There was not the least excuse for this tyrannical action; and the sight filled the Cardinal with rage. He fully expected to see Madam Woodpecker divorce herself and flee her new home, and he most earnestly hoped that she would; but she did no such thing. She meekly flattened her feathers and hustled about in a lively manner, trying in every way to anticipate and avert her lord's displeasure. Under this treatment he grew more abusive, and now Madam Woodpecker dodged every time she came within reach of him. It made the Cardinal feel so vengeful that he longed to go up and drum the sycamore with the woodpecker's head until he taught him how to treat his mate properly.

There was plenty of lark music rolling with the river, and that morning brought the first liquid, golden notes of the orioles. Evidently they had just arrived, and were overjoyed with their home-coming, for they were darting from bank to bank singing exquisitely on wing. There seemed no end to the bird voices that floated with the river, and yet there was no beginning to the one voice for which the Cardinal waited with passionate longing.

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The oriole's singing was so inspiring that it drove the Cardinal to another attempt, and, perching where he gleamed crimson and black against the April sky, he tested his voice a little, and, when sure of his tones, he entreatingly called "Come here! Come here!"

Just then he saw her! She came slipping along on the earth, soft as down before the wind, a rosy flush suffusing her whole plumage, a coral beak, her very feet pink—the shyest, most timid little thing alive. Her bright eyes were popping with fear, and, down there among the ferns, anemones and last year's dried leaves, she tilted her sleek, crested head and peered up at him with frightened wonder.

It was for this that the Cardinal had waited, hoped, and planned for many days. He had rehearsed what he conceived to be every point of the situation, and yet he had made no calculation for the thing that suddenly happened to him. He had expected to reject many applicants before he could select one to match his charms; but in a flash this shy little creature, slipping along near earth, taking a surreptitious peep at him, made him feel a very small bird, and he certainly had never felt small before. The crushing possibility that somewhere there might be a cardinal that was bigger,



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brighter, and a finer musician than himself, staggered him; and, worst of all, his voice broke suddenly.

Down there among the flowers, she looked so little, so shy, so delightfully sweet. He "chipped" carefully once or twice to steady himself and clear his throat, which had unaccountably grown dry and husky; and then he tenderly tried it again. "Come here! Come here!" implored the Cardinal. He forgot all about his dignity. He knew that his voice was trembling with eagerness and hoarse with fear. He was afraid to attempt approaching her, but he leaned toward her, begging and pleading. He teased and insisted, and he did not care a particle if he did. It suddenly seemed an honor to coax her. He rocked on the limb. He side-stepped and hopped and gyrated gracefully. He fluffed and flirted and showed himself off to every advantage. It never occurred to him that the dove and the woodpecker might be watching, though he would not have cared in the least if they had been; and, as for any other cardinal, he would have attacked the combined forces of the Limberlost and the Rainbow Bottom just then.

He sang and sang. Every impulse of passion in his big, crimson, palpitating body was thrown into those

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notes; but she only turned her head from side to side, peering up at him, and looking sufficiently frightened to flee at a breath, and answered not even the faintest little "Chook!" of encouragement.

The Cardinal rested a second before he tried it again. That settled his nerves a little and gave him better command of himself. He could tell that his notes were clearing and growing sweeter. He was improving. Perhaps she was interested. There was a little encouragement in that she was still there. The Cardinal felt that his day had come.

"Come here! Come here!" He was on his mettle now. Surely no cardinal could sing fuller, clearer, sweeter notes! He began at the very first, and rollicked through a story of adventure, coloring it with every wild, dashing, catchy note he could improvise. He followed that with a rippling song of the joy and fullness of spring, in notes as light and airy as the wind-blown soul of melody, and with swaying body kept time to his rhythmic measures. Then he glided into a song of love, and tenderly, pleadingly, passionately, told the story as only a courting bird can tell it. And then he sang a song of ravishment; a song quavering with fear and the pain tugging at his heart.

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He had almost run the gamut, and she really looked far more as if she intended to flee than to come to him ; and he was afraid to take even one timid little hop toward her.

In a fit of desperation the Cardinal burst into the passion song. He rose to his full height, leaned toward her with outspread, quivering wings, and crest flared to the utmost, and, rocking from side to side in the intensity of his fervor, he poured out a perfect torrent of palpitating song. His cardinal body swayed to the rolling flood of his ecstatic notes, until he looked like a flaming, pulsing bit of the soul of music materialized, as he entreated, coaxed, commanded, and plead. From sheer exhaustion, he threw up his head to round off the last note he could utter, and, breathlessly glancing down to see if she were coming, caught sight of a faint streak of gray in the distance. He had planned so to subdue the little female he courted that she would come to him ; but he was in hot pursuit a half day's journey away before he remembered it.

No other cardinal ever was led such a chase as she led him in the following days. Through fear and timidity she had kept much of her life in the underbrush. The Cardinal was a bird of the open fields and tree-tops.

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He loved to rock with the wind, and speed like an arrow in great plunges of flight. This darting and twisting over logs, among leaves, and through tangled thickets, tired, tried, and exasperated him worse than hundreds of miles of open flight. Sometimes he drove her from cover, and then she wildly dashed up hill and down dale, seeking another thicket; but, wherever she went, the Cardinal was just a breath behind her, and with every passing mile his passion for her grew.

There was no time to eat, bathe, or sing; only mile after mile of unceasing pursuit. It seemed that the little creature could not stop if she would, and, as for the Cardinal, he was in that chase to stay until his last heart-beat. It was a question how the poor little thing kept it up. She was visibly the worse for this ardent courtship. Two tail feathers were gone, and there was a broken one beating from one wing. Once she had flown too low, striking her head against a rail until a drop of blood came, and she screamed pitifully. Several times the Cardinal had cornered her, and tried to hold her by a bunch of feathers, and compel her by force to listen to reason; but she only broke from his hold and dashed away like a stricken thing, leaving him half dead with longing and remorse.

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But no matter how baffled she grew, or where she fled in her headlong race, the one thing she always remembered was, not to lead the Cardinal into the wrath that awaited him in the Rainbow Bottom. Panting for breath, quivering with fear, longing for well concealed retreats, worn and half blinded by the disasters of flight through strange country, the little bird beat her aimless way; but she would have been torn to pieces before she would have led her magnificent pursuer into the camp of his enemies.

Poor little feathered sweetheart! She had been fleeing some sort of pursuer all her life. She could not realize that love and protection had come in this splendid guise, and she fled on and on.

Once the Cardinal, aching with passion and love, fell behind a little that she might rest, and, before he realized that another bird was near, an impudent big relative of his, straying from the Limberlost, cut in, and pursued her so hotly that, with a scream of utter panic, she wheeled and darted back to him for protection. When, to the rush of rage that possessed him at the sight of a rival, was added the knowledge that she was seeking him in her extremity, such a mighty wave of anger swept the Cardinal that he looked

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twice his real size. Like a flaming brand of vengeance he struck that Limberlost upstart, and sent him rolling to earth, a mass of battered feathers. With beak and claw he made his attack, and when he had so utterly demolished his rival that he had crept off trembling, with disheveled plumage stained with his own blood, the Cardinal remembered his little love and hastened back, confidently hoping for his reward.

She was so securely hidden that, though he went searching, calling, pleading, he found no trace of her the rest of that day. The Cardinal almost went distracted; and his tender, imploring cries would have moved any but a panic-stricken bird. He did not even know in what direction to pursue her. Night closed in and found him in a panic of love-sick fear, but it brought rest and wisdom. She could not have gone very far. She was too worn. He would not go about proclaiming his presence. She would soon suffer past bearing for food and water.

He went and hid in the willows near where he had lost her, and waited with what patience he could; and it was a wise plan. Just a little after dawn, moving stilly as the break of day, trembling with fear, she came slipping down to the river for a drink. It was almost

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brutal cruelty, but her fear must be overcome somehow; and with a cry of triumph the Cardinal, in a plunge of flight, was beside her. She gave him one stricken look, and dashed away; and the chase began all over again, and went on and on, until she was visibly breaking.

There was no room left for a rival that morning. The Cardinal flew abreast of her and gave her a caress or attempted a kiss whenever he found the ghost of a chance. She was almost worn out, her flights were wavering and growing shorter. The Cardinal did his utmost. If she paused to rest, he crept just as near as he dared, and piteously begged "Come here! Come here!"

When she took wing, he so dexterously intercepted her course that she several times took refuge in his sumac without realizing where she was. When she did that, he perched just as near as he dared; and, while they both rested, he sang to her a soft little whispered love song, away down in his throat; and, with every note, he gently edged nearer. She turned her head from him, and, though she was panting for breath and palpitating with fear, the Cardinal knew that he dared not go closer, or she would dash away like the wild thing she was. The next time she took

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wing, she found him so persistently in her course that she turned sharply and fled panting back to the sumac. When this had happened so often that she seemed to recognize the sumac as a place of refuge, the Cardinal slipped aside and spent all his remaining breath in an exultant whistle of triumph, for he was beginning to see his way now. He dashed into mid air, and, with a gyration that would have done credit to a fly-catcher, he snapped up a gadfly.

With tender "Chip!" from branch to branch, slowly, cautiously, he came with it. Because he was half starved himself, he knew that she must be almost famished. Holding it where she could see it, he hopped toward her, eagerly, carefully, the gadfly in his beak, his heart in his mouth. He stretched his neck and legs to the limit as he reached the fly toward her. What matter that she took it with a snap, and plunged a quarter of a mile to eat it? She had taken it! That was the beginning. Cautiously he impelled her back to the sumac, and with untiring patience kept her there the rest of the day. He carried her every choice morsel he could snap up in the immediate vicinity of the sumac, and occasionally she took a bit from his beak, though oftenest he was compelled to lay it on a limb



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beside her. At dusk she repeatedly dashed for the underbrush; but the Cardinal, with endless patience and tenderness, manœvered her back to the sumac, until she gave up, and, under the shelter of a neighboring grape-vine, perched on a limb that was the Cardinal's own chosen resting place, tucked her poor, tired little head under her wing, and went to sleep. When she was soundly sleeping, the Cardinal crept as close as he dared, and, with one eye on his little gray love, and the other roving for any possible danger, he put in a night of watching.

He was almost worn out; but it was infinitely better than the previous night, at any rate, for now not only did he know where she was, but she was fast asleep in his own favorite place. Huddled on the limb, the Cardinal gloated over her. He found her beauty perfect. To be sure, she was disheveled; but she could make her toilet. There were a few feathers gone; but they would speedily grow. She made a heart-satisfying little picture, on which the Cardinal feasted his love-sick soul, by the light of every straying moon-beam that slid around the edges of the grape leaves.

Wave after wave of tender passion shook him.

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Away down in his throat half the night he kept softly calling to her: "Come here! Come here!"

Next morning, when the robins waked the day along the shining river, she woke with a start; but, before she could decide in which direction to fly, she discovered a nice fresh grub laid on the limb beside her, and very sensibly stayed for breakfast. Then the Cardinal went down to the river and bathed. He made such a delightful play of it, and the splash of the water sounded so refreshing to the tired, draggled bird, that she could not resist venturing down for a few flips herself. When she was wet she could not fly well, and he improved the opportunity to pull her broken quills, help her dress herself, and bestow a few extra caresses. He led her to his favorite place for a sun bath; and followed the farmer's plow in the corn-field until he found a big, sweet beetle. He snapped off his head, peeled the stiff wing shields, and daintily offered it to her. He was so delighted when she took it from his beak, and stayed in the sumac to eat it, that he went and established himself on a near-by thornbush, where the snowy blossoms of a wild morning-glory made a fine background for his scarlet coat; and he sang the old pleading song as he had never sung it



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before, for now there was a tinge of hope battling with the fear in his heart.

Over and over he sang, rounding, filling, swelling every note, leaning to her in coaxing tenderness, flashing his brilliant beauty as he swayed and rocked, for her approval; and all that he had suffered and all that he hoped for was in his song. Just when his heart was growing sick within him, his straining ear caught the faintest, most timid call a lover ever answered. Only one imploring little "Chook!" from the sumac! His song broke in a suffocating burst of exultation. Cautiously he hopped from twig to twig toward her. With tender throaty murmurings he slowly edged nearer and, wonder of wonders! with tired eyes and quivering wings, she reached him her beak for a kiss.

At dinner that day, the farmer said to his wife: "Marier, if you want to hear the purtiest singin', an' see the cutest sight you ever saw, jest come down along the line fence an' watch the antics o' that red-bird we been hearin'."

"I dunno as redbirds are so skeerce 'at I've any call to wade through slush a half-mile to see one," answered Maria.

"Footin's purty good along the line fence," said

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Abram, “an’ you never saw no redbird like this feller. He’s as big as any two common ones. He’s so red every bush he lights on looks like it was afire. It’s past all question, he’s been somebody’s pet, an’ he’s taken me fer the man. I kin git in six feet of him easy. He’s the finest bird I ever set eyes on; an’ as fer singin’, he’s dropped the weather, an’ he’s askin’ folks to his house-warmin’ to-day. He’s been there alone fer a week, an’ his singin’s been first-class; but to-day he’s picked up a mate, an’ he’s as tickled as ever I was. I am reely consarned fer fear he’ll bu’st hisself.”

Maria sniffed.

“Course, don’t come if you’re tired, honey,” said the farmer, “I thought mebby you’d enj’y it. He’s a-doin’ me a power o’ good. My jint’s are limbered up till I ketch myself purt’ nigh runnin’, on the up furry, an’ then, down towards the fence, I go slow so’s to stay nigh him as long as I kin.”

Maria stared. “Abram Johnson, hev you gone daft?” she demanded.

Abram chuckled. “Not a mite dafter’n you’ll be, honey, onct you set eyes on the feller. Better come, if you kin. You’re invited. He’s askin’ the hull endurin’ country to come.”

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Maria said nothing more; but she mentally decided she had no time to fool away over a bird, when there was housekeeping and spring sewing to do. As she recalled Abram's enthusiastic praise of the singer, and when she got a whiff of the odor-laden air as she passed from the kitchen to the spring-house, she was compelled to admit that it was a temptation to go; but she finished her noon work and resolutely sat down with her needle. She stitched industriously, her thread straightening with a quick, nervous sweep, caught by years of experience; and, if her eyes wandered riverward, and if she paused frequently with arrested hand and listened intently, she did not realize it. By two o'clock, a spirit of unrest that demanded recognition had taken possession of her. Setting her lips firmly, a scowl clouding her brow, she fought it down and stitched away. By half-past two her hands dropped in her lap, Abram's new hickory shirt slid to the floor, and she hesitatingly rose and crossed the room to the closet, from which she took her overshoes, and set them by the kitchen fire, just to have them ready in case she wanted them.

"Pshaw!" she muttered, "I got this shirt to finish this afternoon. There's butter an' bakin' in the morn-

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in', an' Mary Jane Simms is comin' fer a visit in the afternoon."

She went back to the window and took up the shirt, sewing with unusual swiftness for the next half-hour; but by three she dropped it, and, opening the kitchen door, gazed riverward.

Every intoxicating delight of early spring was in the air. The breeze that fanned her cheek was laden with subtle perfume of pollen and the crisp, fresh odor of unfolding leaves. Curling skyward, like a beckoning finger, went a spiral of violet and gray smoke from the log heap Abram was burning; and scattered over spaces of a mile were half a dozen others, telling a story of the activity of his neighbors. Like the low murmur of distant music came the beating wings of hundreds of her bees, rimming the water trough, insane with thirst. On the wood-pile the guinea cock clattered incessantly, "Phut rack! Phut rack!"; but there was not the sound of an answering cheep from the little speckled hen brooding on her nineteen dirt-colored eggs in a little dip under the orchard fence. Across the dooryard came the old turkey gobbler with fan tail and a rasping scrape of wing, evincing his delight in spring and mating time by a series of explosive



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snorts. On the barnyard gate the old shanghai was lustily challenging to mortal combat one of his kind three miles across country. Up from the river rose the strident scream of her blue gander jealously guarding his harem. In the poultry yard the hens made a noisy cackling party, and the stable lot was filled with cattle bellowing for the freedom of the meadow pasture, as yet scarcely ready for grazing. It seemed to the little woman, hesitating in the doorway, as if all nature had entered into a conspiracy to lure her from her work, and just then, clear and imperious, rose the demand of the Cardinal, "Come here! Come here!"

Blank amazement filled her face. "As I'm a livin' woman," she gasped, "he's changed his song! That's what Abram meant by me bein' invited. He's a-askin' folks to see his wife. I'm a-goin'."

The dull red of excitement sprang into her cheeks. She hurried on her overshoes, and caught an old shawl over her head. She crossed the dooryard, cut a corner of the orchard, and came out in the lane. A little below the barn she turned back and attempted to cross the lane. The mud was deep and thick, and she lost an overshoe; but with the help of a stick she pried it out, and, balancing on the other foot, replaced it.

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“Joke on me if I’d a-tumbled over in this mud,” she muttered.

She entered the barn, and came out a little later, carefully closing and buttoning the door, and, recrossing the lane, started down the line fence toward the river.

Half-way across the field Abram saw her coming. No need to recount how often he had looked that way during the afternoon. He slapped the lines on the old gray’s back and came tearing down the slope, his eyes flashing, his cheeks red, his hands firmly gripping the plow that rolled up a great line of black mold as he passed.

Maria, staring at his flushed face and shining eyes, recognized that his whole being proclaimed an inward exultation.

“Abram Johnson,” she solemnly demanded, “hey you got the power?”

“Yes,” cried Abram, pulling off his old felt hat, and gazing into the crown as if for inspiration; “you’ve said it, honey! I got the power! Got it of a leetle red bird! Power o’ spring! Power o’ song! Power o’ love! If that pore leetle red target fer some ornery cuss’s bullet kin git all he’s a-gittin’ out o’ life to-day, hain’t no cause why a reasonin’, thinkin’ man ortn’t realize some o’ his blessin’s. You hit it, Marier; I got the power.



## The Song of the Cardinal

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It's the power o' God, but I learnt how to lay hold on it from that leetle red bird. Come here, Marier!"

Abram wrapped the lines around the plow handle, and cautiously led his wife to the fence. He found a piece of thick bark for her to stand on, and placed her where she would be screened by a big oak. Then he stood behind her and pointed out the sumac and the little bride.

"Jest you keep still a minute, an' you'll feel paid fer comin' all right, honey," he whispered.

"I dunno as I ever see a worse lookin' specimen o' female bird 'an she is," answered Maria.

"She looks firs'-class to him. They's no kick comin' on his part, I kin tell you," replied Abram.

The bride hopped shyly about the sumac. She pecked at the dried berries, and frequently tried to improve her plumage, which certainly had been badly draggled; and there was a drop of blood dried at the base of her beak. She showed the effects of her rough experience plainly, and yet she was a most attractive little bird; for the dimples in her plump body showed through the feathers, and, instead of the usual wick-edly black eyes of the cardinal family, hers were a soft, tender brown, lit by a love-light there was no

## The Song of the Cardinal

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mistaking. She was a beautiful bird, and she was doing all in her power to make herself dainty again. Her movements plainly showed how nervous she was, and yet she stuck to the sumac as if she feared to leave it; and she frequently peered among the tree-tops as if she expected some one.

There was a burst of exultation away down the river. The little bride gave her plumage a fluff, and watched anxiously. On came the Cardinal like a flaming rocket, calling to her on wing. He lit by her, dropped into her beak a juicy worm, gave her a kiss to aid digestion, caressingly ran his beak the length of her wing quills, and flew to the dogwood. Mrs. Cardinal liked that worm. It struck her palate exactly right. She liked the kiss and caress, liked, in fact, all that he did for her, and with the appreciation of his tenderness came repentance for the dreadful chase she had led him in her foolish fright, and an impulse to repay. She took a dainty little hop toward the dogwood, and the invitation she sent him was exquisite. With a shrill whistle of exultant triumph the Cardinal came at a headlong rush.

The farmer's grip tightened on his wife's shoulder, but Maria turned on him with blazing, tear-filled





## The Song of the Cardinal

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eyes. "An' you call yerself a decent man, Abram Johnson?"

"Decent?" quavered the astonished Abram. "Decent? I cackilate I am."

"I cackilate you ain't," hotly retorted his wife. "You dunno what decency is, if you go peekin' at 'em. They hain't birds! They're more'n birds! They're folks! Jest common human folks!"

"Marier," pleaded Abram, "Marier, honey."

"I am plum ashamed o' you," broke in Maria. "How d'you spose she'd feel if she knowed they was a man here a-peekin' at her? Ain't he got a right to be lovin' and tender? Ain't she got a right to pay him best she knows? They're jest common human bein's, an' I dunno where you got privilege to spy on a female when she's a-doin' the best she kin."

Maria broke from his grasp and started down the line fence.

In a few strides Abram had her in his arms, his withered cheek with its spring-time bloom pressed against her equally withered tear-stained one.

"Marier," he whispered, waveringly, "Marier, honey, I wasn't a-meanin' no disrespect to the sex."

Maria wiped her eyes on the corner of her shawl.

## The Song of the Cardinal

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“I don’t s’pose you wus, Abram,” she admitted; “but you’re jest like all the rest o’ the men. You never think! Now you go on with yer plowin’ an’ let that little woman alone.”

She unclasped his arms and turned homeward.

“Honey,” called Abram softly, “sence you brought ’em that pocketful o’ wheat, you might as well lemme hev it.”

“Landy!” exclaimed Maria, blushing a little, “I plum forgot my wheat! I thought mebbe, bein’ so early, pickin’ was skeerce, an’ if you’d put out a leetle wheat an’ a few crumbs, they’d stay an’ nest in the sumac, as you’re so fond o’ them.”

“Jest what I’m fairly prayin’ they’ll do, an’ I been carryin’ stuff an’ pettin’ him up best I knowed fer a week,” said Abram, as he knelt, and cupped his shrunken hands, while Maria guided the wheat from her apron down into them. “I’ll scatter it along the top rail, an’ they’ll be into it in fifteen minutes. Thanky, Marier. ’Twas good o’ you to think of it.”

Maria watched him steadily. How dear he was! How dear he always had been! How happy they were together! “Abram,” she questioned, hesitatingly, “is there anything else I could do fer—fer yer birds?”



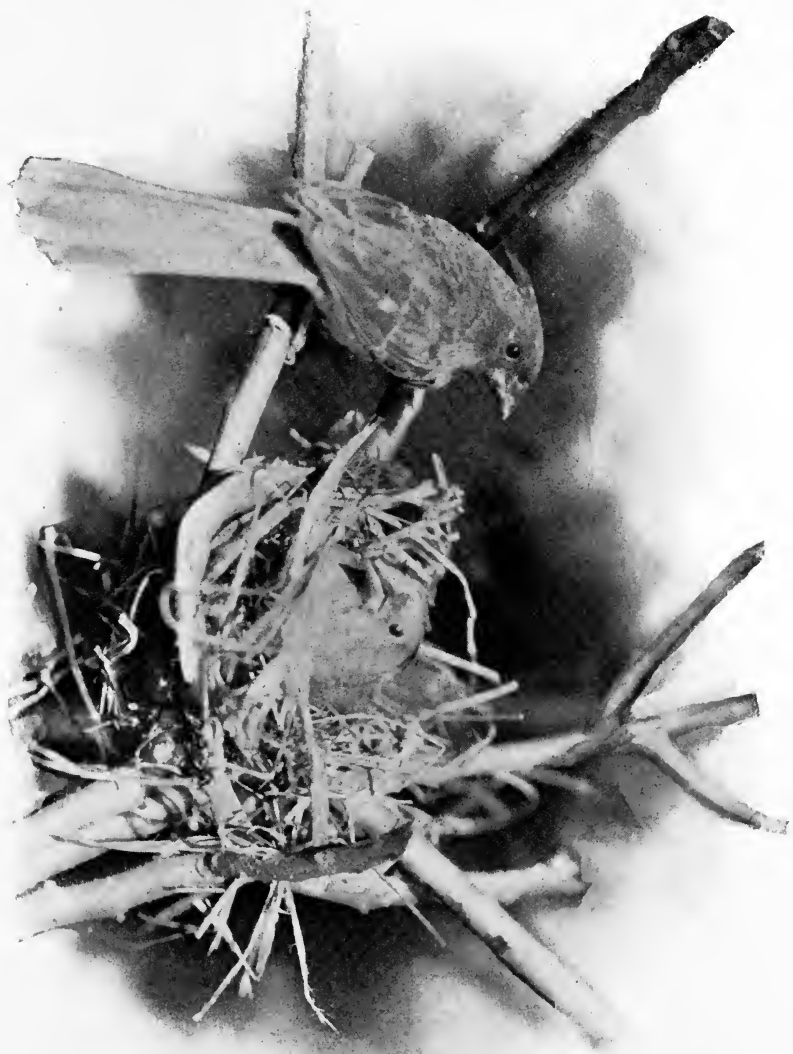
## The Song of the Cardinal

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They were creatures of habitual repression, and the inner glimpses they had had of each other that day were surprises they scarcely knew how to meet. Abram said nothing, because he could not. He slowly shook his head, and turned with misty eyes to the plow. Maria started back up the line fence, but she paused repeatedly to listen; and it was no wonder, for all the redbirds from miles down the river had gathered about the sumac to see if there was a riot in birdland; but it was only the Cardinal, turning somersaults in the air, and screaming with bursting exuberance, "Come here! Come here!"







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*“So dear! So dear!” crooned the Cardinal*



She had taken possession of the sumac. He let her select the crotch and loudly applauded her choice. She placed the first twig, and, after examining it carefully, he spent the day carrying her others just as nearly like it as possible. If she used a dried grass blade, he carried grass blades until she began dropping them

on the ground. If she worked in a bit of wild grape-vine bark, he peeled grape-vines until she would have no more. It never occurred to him that he was the largest cardinal in the woods, in those days, and he had forgotten that he wore a red coat. She was not much of an architect. Her nest certainly was a loose, ramshackle affair; but she had built it, and had allowed

## The Song of the Cardinal

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him to help her. It was hers; and he improvised a pæan in its praise. Every morning he perched on the edge of the nest and gazed in songless wonder at each beautiful new egg; and whenever she came to brood she sat as if entranced, eying her treasures in an abandonment of proud possession.

Then she nestled them against her warm breast, and turned adoring eyes to the Cardinal. If he sang from the dogwood, she faced that way. If he rocked on the wild grape-vine, she turned in her nest. If he went to the cornfield for grubs, she stood astride her eggs and peered down, watching his every move with unconcealed anxiety. The Cardinal forgot to be vain of his beauty; she delighted in it every hour of the day. Shy and timid beyond belief she had been during her courtship; but she made up for it by being an incomparably generous and devoted mate.

And the Cardinal! He was astonished to find himself capable of so much and such varied feeling. It was not enough that he brooded while she went to bathe and exercise. The daintiest of every morsel he found was carried to her. When she refused to swallow another particle, he perched on a twig near the nest many times in a day; and, with sleek feathers



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## The Song of the Cardinal

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and lowered crest, gazed at her in silent, worshipful adoration.

Up and down the river bank he flamed and rioted. In the sumac he uttered not the faintest little "Chip!" that might attract attention, and tried so hard to be inconspicuous that he appeared only half his real size. Always on leaving he gave her a tender little peck and ran his beak the length of her wing—a characteristic caress that he delighted to bestow on her.

If he felt that he was disturbing her too often, he perched on the dogwood and sang for life, and love, and happiness. His music was in a minor key now. The high, exultant, ringing notes of passion were mellowed and subdued. He was improvising cradle songs and lullabies. He was telling her how he loved her, how he would fight for her, how he was watching over her, how he would signal if any danger were coming, how proud he was of her, what a perfect nest she had built, how beautiful he thought her eggs, what magnificent babies they would bring. Full of tenderness, melting with love, liquid with sweetness, the Cardinal sang to his patient little brooding mate, "So dear! So dear!"

The farmer leaned on his corn planter and listened

## The Song of the Cardinal

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to him intently. "I swanny! If he ain't changed his song again, an' this time I'm blest if I kin tell what he's sayin'!" Every time the Cardinal lifted his voice, the clip of the corn planter ceased, and Abram hung on the notes and studied them over.

One night he said to his wife: "Marier, hev' you been noticin' the redbird o' late? He's changed to a new tune, an' this time I'm completely stalled. I can't fer the life o' me make out what he's sayin'. S'pose you step down to-morry an' see if you kin ketch it fer me. I'd give a purty to know!"

Maria felt flattered. She had always believed that she had a musical ear. Here was a good chance to test it and please Abram at the same time. She hastened her work the next morning, and bright and early slipped down along the line fence. Hiding behind the oak, with straining ear and throbbing heart, she eagerly listened. "Clip, clip," came the sound of the planter, as Abram's dear old figure trudged up the hill. "Chip! Chip!" came the warning of the Cardinal, as he flew to his mate.

He gave her a fine worm, stroked her wing, and, flying to the dogwood, he sang of the love that encompassed him. And as he trilled forth his tender caress-

## The Song of the Cardinal

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ing strain, the heart of the listening woman translated as did that of the brooding bird.

With shining eyes and flushed cheeks, she sped down the fence. She met Abram half-way on his return trip, panting and palpitating with excitement. Forgetful of her habitual reserve, she threw her arms about his neck, and, drawing his face down to hers, she cried: "Oh, Abram! I got it! I got it! I know what he's sayin'! Oh, Abram, my love! My own! To me so dear! So dear!"

"So dear! So dear!" echoed the Cardinal.

The bewilderment in Abram's face melted into comprehension. He swept Maria off her feet as he lifted his head.

"On my soul! You hev' got it, honey! That's what he's sayin' plain as gospel! I kin tell it plainer'n anything he's said yit, now I sense it."

He gathered Maria in his arms, pressed her head to his breast with a trembling old hand, and the face he turned to the morning was beautiful.

"I wish to God," he said quaveringly, "'at every critter on airth wus as well fixed as me an' the redbird!" Claspng each other, they listened with rapt faces as, mellowing across the cornfield, came the notes of the Cardinal,—“So dear! So dear!”

## The Song of the Cardinal

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After that Abram's devotion to his bird family became a mild mania. He carried food to the top rail of the line fence every day, rain or shine, with the same regularity that he curried and fed Nancy out in the barn. And from caring for and so loving the Cardinal, there grew up in his tender old heart a welling flood of sympathy for every bird that homed on his farm.

He drove a stake to mark the spot where the killdeer hen brooded in the cornfield, so that he would not drive Nancy over it. When he closed the bars at the end of the lane, he was always careful to leave the third one down, for there was a chippy brooding in the opening where it fitted when closed. Alders and sweet-briers grew in his fence corners undisturbed that spring if he discovered that they sheltered an anxious-eyed little mother. He left a square yard of clover unmowed, because it seemed to him that the lark, singing nearer the Throne than any other bird, was picking up stray notes dropped by the Invisible Choir, and, with unequalled purity and tenderness, sending them ringing down to his tired little brooding mate, whose home and happiness would be despoiled by the reaping of that little patch of clover. He delayed burning the brush-heap from the spring pruning, back of the or-

## The Song of the Cardinal

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chard, until fall, when he found it housed a pair of fine thrushes; and the song of the thrush delighted him almost as much as that of the lark. He left a hollow limb on the old red pearmain apple-tree, because when he came to cut it there was a pair of bluebirds twittering about, frantic with anxiety.

His pockets were bulgy with wheat and crumbs, and his heart was big with happiness. It was the golden springtime of his later life. The sky had never seemed so blue, nor the earth so beautiful. The Cardinal had opened up the fountains of his soul; life took on a new color and a new joy; and every work of God manifested a fresh and heretofore unappreciated loveliness. His very muscles seemed to relax, and new strength arose to meet the demands of his uplifted spirit. He had not finished his day's work with such ease and pleasure in years; and he could see the influence of his rejuvenation in Maria. She was flitting about her house with broken snatches of song, even sweeter to Abram's ears than the song of the birds; and in these last days he had noticed that she sat down to her afternoon's sewing wearing her Sunday lace collar and a white apron. He immediately went to town and bought her a finer collar than she had ever owned.

## The Song of the Cardinal

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Then he hunted up a sign painter, and came away bearing a number of pine boards on which gleamed in big, shiny black letters :

NO HUNTING ALLOWED ON  
THIS FARM

He seemed slightly embarrassed when he showed them to Maria. "I feel a leetle mite onfriendly, puttin' up signs like that 'fore my neighbors," he admitted, "but, the fact is, it ain't the neighbors so much as it's boys 'at needs raisin', an' them town critters 'at calls theirselves sportsmen, an' kills a hummin'bird to see if they can hit it. Time was when trees an' underbresh was full o' birds an' squirrels, any amount o' rabbits, an' the fish fairly crowdin' in the river. Ust to kill all the quail an' wild turkeys about here a-body needed to make an appetizin' change o' vittles. It wus allus my plan to take a leetle an' leave a leetle. But jest look at it now. Surprise o' my life if I git a two-pound bass. Wild turkey gobblin' 'ud skeer me most outer my senses, an', as fer the birds, they's jest about a fourth what they ust to be, an' the crops et up to pay fer it.



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## The Song of the Cardinal

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I'd do all I'm tryin' to do fer any bird, fer its song an' color, an' purty teeterin' ways, but I ain't so slow but I see I'm paid in what they do fer me. Up go these here signs, an' it won't be a happy day fer anybody I ketch trespassin' on my birds."

Maria looked at the signs meditatively. "You ortn't be forced to put 'em up," she said conclusively. "If it's bin decided 'at it's good fer 'em to be here, an' laws made to protect 'em, people ort to act with some sense, an' leave 'em 'lone. I never was so int'ested in the birds in all my life; an' I'll jest do a leetle lookin' out myself. An' if you hear a spang o' the dinner bell when you're out in the field, you'll know it means there's some one sneakin' 'round with a gun."

Abram made a dive for Maria and planted a resounding smack on her cheek, where the roses of girlhood still bloomed for him. Then he filled his pockets with crumbs and grain, and strolled down to set the Cardinal's table. He could hear the sharp incisive "Chip!" and the tender, mellow love-notes as he left the barn; and all the way to the sumac they rang in his ears.

The Cardinal met him at the corner of the field, and hopped over the bushes and the fence only a few yards

## The Song of the Cardinal

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from him. When Abram had scattered his store along the rail, he came tipping and tilting, daintily caught up a crumb, and carried it to the sumac. His mate was pleased to take it; and he carried her one morsel after another until she refused to open her beak for more. He made a light supper himself; and then, swinging on the grape-vine, he closed the day with an hour of music. He repeatedly turned a bright, questioning eye on Abram, but he never for a moment lost sight of the nest and the plump little gray figure of his bride. As she brooded over her eggs, he brooded over her; and, that she might realize the depth and constancy of his devotion, he told her repeatedly, with every tender inflection he could throw into his tones, that she was "So dear! So dear!"

The Cardinal had not dreamed that the coming of the mate he so coveted would fill his life with such unceasing gladness, and yet, on the very day that happiness seemed at fullest measure, there was trouble in the sumac. The Cardinal had overstayed his time, chasing a fat moth he particularly wanted for his mate, and she, growing thirsty past bearing, left the nest and went down to the river to drink. Seeing her there, he made all possible haste to take his turn at brood-

## The Song of the Cardinal

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ing, and he arrived just in time to see a pilfering red squirrel starting off with an egg.

With a vicious scream the Cardinal struck him full force. His rush of rage cost the squirrel an eye; but it lost the father a birdling, for the squirrel dropped the egg outside the nest. The Cardinal mournfully carried away the tell-tale bits of shell, so that any one seeing them would not look up and discover his treasures. That left three eggs; and the brooding bird mourned over the lost one so pitifully that the Cardinal perched close to the nest all day, and whispered over and over for her comfort that she was "So dear! So dear!"







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*"See here! See here!" shouted the Cardinal*



The mandate repeatedly rang from the topmost twig of the sumac, and yet the Cardinal did not really mean what he said. He was beside himself with a new and delightful excitement, and he could not possibly refrain from giving vent to his feelings. He was commanding the farmer and every furred and feathered denizen of the

river bottom to see ; and then he fought like a wild thing if any of them ventured near, for great things were happening in the sumac.

In the past days the Cardinal had brooded an hour every morning while his mate went to take her exercise, bathe, and fluff in the sun parlor. He had gone to her that morning as usual, and she looked at

## The Song of the Cardinal

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him with anxious eyes and refused to budge. He had hopped to the very edge of the nest and urged her to go repeatedly; and she only ruffled her feathers, and moved sidewise to turn the eggs she was nestling, but did not offer to leave. The Cardinal reached over and gently nudged her with his beak, to remind her that it was his time to brood; but she looked at him almost savagely, and gave him a little peck; and then he knew that she was not to be bothered. He carried her every dainty he could find, and hovered near her, tense with anxiety, almost all the day.

It was late in the afternoon before she went for the drink for which she was half famished; and she had barely reached a willow and bent over the water before the Cardinal was on the edge of the nest. He examined it closely, but he could see no change. He leaned to give the eggs careful scrutiny, and from somewhere there came to him the faintest little "Chip!" he had ever heard. Up went the Cardinal's crest, and he made a dash for the willow. There was no danger in sight; and his mate was greedily dipping her rosy beak in the water. He went back to the cradle and listened intently, and again that feeble little cry came to him. Under the nest, around



## The Song of the Cardinal

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it, and all about the sumac he searched, and, at last, completely baffled, he came back to the edge. The sound was so much plainer there, that he suddenly leaned, caressing the eggs with his beak; and then the Cardinal knew! He had been hearing the first faint chips of his shell-encased babies!

With a wild scream he made a flying leap through the air. His heart was beating to suffocation. He started in a headlong race down the river. If he struck a bush he took only one swing, and springing from it flamed on in headlong flight. He flashed to the top of the tallest tulip tree, and shouted cloudward to the lark, "See here! See here!" He dashed down to the river bank and told the killdeers, and then visited the underbrush and informed the thrushes and wood robins. Father-tender, he grew so delirious with joy that he forgot his habitual aloofness, and fraternized with every bird along the shining river. He even laid aside his customary caution, went shouting into the sumac, and caressed his mate so boisterously she had to frown at him severely and give him a sharp little peck to recall him to his sober senses.

That night the Cardinal slept in the sumac, very close to his mate, and he closed only one eye at a time.

## The Song of the Cardinal

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Early in the morning, when he carried her the first grub, he found that she was on the edge of the nest, dropping bits of shell outside; and, creeping up to peep, he saw the tiniest coral baby, with closed eyes, and little patches of soft, silky down. Its beak was wide open, and, though his heart was even fuller than on the previous day, the Cardinal knew what that meant; and instead of indulging in another celebration, he assumed the duties of paternity, and went searching for food, for now there were two empty crops in his family. By the next day there were four. Then he really worked. How eagerly he searched, and how gladly he flew to the sumac with every rare morsel! The babies were too small for the little mother to leave; and for the first few days the Cardinal was constantly on wing.

If he could not find sufficiently dainty food for them in the trees and bushes, or among the offerings of the farmer, he got down on the earth and dug like a wood robin. He forgot he needed a bath or owned a sun parlor; but everywhere he went, from his full heart there constantly burst the cry, "See here! See here!"

His mate made never a sound. Her eyes were bigger and softer than ever, and lit by a love-light there

## The Song of the Cardinal

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was no mistaking. She hovered over those three red mites of nestlings so tenderly! She was so absorbed in feeding, stroking, and coddling them that she neglected herself until she grew quite thin. When the Cardinal came every few minutes with food, she was a picture of love and gratitude for his devoted attention, and once she reached over and softly kissed his wing. "See here! See here!" shrilled the Cardinal; and in his ecstasy he again forgot himself and shouted aloud in the sumac. Then he carried food with greater activity than ever to cover his lapse.

The farmer knew that it lacked an hour of noon, but he was so anxious to tell Maria the news that he could not bear it another minute. There was a new song from the sumac. He had heard it as he turned the first corner with the shovel plow. He had eagerly listened, and had caught the meaning almost at once,— "See here! See here!" He tied the old gray mare to the fence to prevent her eating the young corn, and went immediately. By leaning a rail against the thorn tree he was able to peer into the sumac, and get a good look at the nest of handsome birdlings, now well screened by the umbrella-like foliage. It seemed to Abram that he could never wait until noon. He critically

## The Song of the Cardinal

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examined the harness, in the hope that there was a buckle missing, and tried to discover a flaw in the plow that would send him to the barn for a file; but he could not find the ghost of an excuse for going. So, when he had finally hung on until an hour of noon, he could bear it no longer.

“Got news fer you, Marier,” he shouted from the well, where he was making a pretense of great thirst.

“Oh, I don’t know,” answered Maria, with a superior smile. “If it’s about the redbirds, he’s been up to the garden three times this morning yellin’, ‘See here!’ fit to split; an’ I jest figgered ’at they’d hatched their young-uns. Is that yer news?”

“Well, I be durned!” gasped the astonished Abram.

Mid-afternoon Abram turned Nancy and started the plow down a row that led straight to the sumac. He meant to stop there, tie up to the fence, and go over on the river bank, in the shade, for a visit with the Cardinal. It was very warm, and he was feeling the heat so much, that in his heart he knew he would be glad to reach the end of the row and the little rest he had promised himself.

The quick, nervous strokes of the dinner bell, “Clang! Clang!” came cutting the air clearly and

## The Song of the Cardinal

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sharply. Abram stopped Nancy with a jerk. It was the warning Maria had promised to send him if she saw prowlers with a gun. He shaded his eyes with his hand and scanned the points of the compass through narrowed lids with concentrated vision. His eyes first caught a gleam of light playing along a gun barrel, and then he could discern the figure of a man clad in hunter's outfit leisurely making his way down the lane.

Abram hastily hitched Nancy to the fence. By making the best time he could, he reached the opposite corner, and was nibbling the midrib of a young corn blade and placidly viewing the landscape when the hunter came by.

"Howdy!" he said in an even, cordial voice.

The hunter passed without lifting his eyes or making audible reply. To Abram's friendly, old-fashioned heart this seemed the rankest discourtesy; and there was a flash in his eye and a certain unnatural quality in his voice as he lifted a hand for parley.

"Hold a minute, my friend," he said. "Sence you air on my premises, might I be priviledged to ask if you hev' seen a few signs 'at I hev' posted pertainin' to the use of a gun?"

"I am not blind," replied the hunter; "and my

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education has been looked after to the extent that I can make out your notices. From the number and size of them, I think I could do it, old man, if I had no eyes."

The scarcely suppressed sneer, and the "old man" grated on Abram's nerves amazingly, for a man of sixty years of peace. The gleam in his eyes grew stronger, and there was a perceptible lift in his shoulders as he answered:

"I meant 'em to be read, an' understood! From the main road passin' that cabin up there on the bank, straight down to the river, an' from the furthestmost line o' this field to the same, is my premises, an' on every foot of 'em them signs is in full force. They're in a leetle fuller force in June, when half the bushes an' tufts o' grass is housin' a young bird family, 'an at any other time. They're sort o' upholdin' the legislater's act, pervidin' fer the pertection o' game an' singin' birds; an' mebbly it 'ud be well fer ye to notice 'at I'm not so old but I'm able to stand up fer my rights agin any livin' man."

There certainly was an added tinge of respect in the hunter's tones as he asked: "Would you consider it trespass if a man simply crossed your land, following the line of the fences to reach the farm of a friend?"

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“Sartainly not!” cried Abram, cordial in his relief. “To be sure, not! Glad to hev’ you convenience yer-self. I only jest wanted to call to yer notice ’at the birds was pertected on this farm.”

“I have no intention of interfering with your precious birds, I assure you,” replied the hunter. “And if you require an explanation of the gun in June, I confess I did hope to be able to pick off a squirrel for a very sick friend. But I suppose for even such cause it would not be allowed on your premises.”

“Oh, pshaw, now!” said Abram. “Man alive! I’m not onreasonable. O’ course in case o’ sickness I’d be glad if you could run acrost a squirrel. All I wanted wus jest to hev’ a clear understandin’ ’bout the birds. Good luck, an’ good day to you!”

Abram started back across the field to Nancy, but he repeatedly turned to follow the gleam of the gun barrel, as the hunter rounded the corner of the field and started down the river bank. He saw him leave the line of the fence and disappear in the thicket.

“Goin’ straight fer the sumac,” muttered Abram. “It’s likely I’m a fool fer not stayin’ right by him past that p’int. An’ yit—I made it fair an’ plain, an’ he passed his word ’at he wouldn’t tech the birds.”

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He untied Nancy, and for the second time started down the row to the sumac. He had been plowing carefully, his attention divided between the mare and the corn; but he uprooted half that row, for his eyes wandered to the Cardinal's home as if he was fascinated, and his hands were shaking with undue excitement as he gripped the plow handles. At last he stopped Nancy, and stood eagerly gazing toward the river.

"Must be jest about to the sumac," he whispered. "Lord! but I'll be glad to see that ol' gun bar' l gleamin' safe t'other side o' it."

There was a thin puff of smoke, and a screaming echo went rolling and reverberating down the Wabash. Abram's eyes widened, and a curious whiteness settled about his lips. He stood as if incapable of moving. "Clang! Clang!" came clashing Maria's second warning.

The trembling slid out of him, and his muscles hardened like steel. There was no trace of rheumatic stiffness in his movements. With a bound he struck the chain-traces from the singletree at Nancy's heels. He caught the hames, leaped to her back, and, digging his heels into her sides, he stretched along her neck like an Indian and raced across the cornfield. Nancy's



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twenty years slid from her as her master's sixty had from him. Without understanding the emergency, she knew that he required all the speed there was in her; and, with trace-chains rattling and beating about her heels, she stretched out until she fairly swept the young corn, as she raced for the sumac. Once Abram straightened, and, slipping a hand into his pocket, drew out a formidable jack-knife, opening it as he rode. When he reached the fence, he almost flew over Nancy's head. Like a flash he went into a fence corner, and, with a few slashes, severed a stout hickory withe, stripping the leaves and topping it as he leaped the fence.

He grasped this ugly weapon, his eyes dark with anger, as he burst on the hunter, who supposed him at the other side of the field.

“Did you shoot at that redbird?” he roared.

As his gun was at the sportsman's shoulder, and he was still peering among the bushes, denial seemed useless. “Yes, I did,” he replied, and made a pretense of turning to the bushes again.

There was a forward impulse of Abram's body. “Hit 'im?” he demanded with awful calm.

“Thought I had, but I guess I only winged him.”

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Abram's fingers closed around his club like steel bands.

At the sound of his friend's voice, the Cardinal came darting through the bushes like a tongue of flame, and swept so close to him for protection that his wing almost brushed his cheek.

"See here! See here!" screamed the bird in deadly panic. There was not a cut feather to be seen on him.

Abram's relief was so great he seemed to shrink an inch in height.

"Young man, you better thank yer God you missed that bird," he said solemnly, "fer if you'd killed him, I'd a mauled this stick to ribbons on ye, an' I'm most afeered I wouldn't a-knowed when to quit."

He advanced a step in his earnestness, and the hunter, mistaking his motive, leveled his gun.

"Drop that!" shouted Abram, as he broke through the bushes that clung to him, tore the clothing from his shoulders, and held him back. "Drop that! Don't you durst p'int no weepin at me, an' on my own premises, an' after you passed yer word.

"Yer word!" repeated Abram, with withering scorn, his white, quivering old face terrible to see. "Young man, I got a couple o' things to say to you.

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You'r' shaped like a man, an' you'r' dressed like a man, an' yit the smartest person livin' 'ud never take you fer anything but a egg-suckin' dog, this minute. All the time God ever spent on you wus wasted, an' yer mother's had the same luck. I s'pose God's used to hev'in' the critters 'at He's made, go wrong, but I pity yer mother. Goodness knows a woman suffers an' works enough over her children, an' then to fetch a boy to man's estate an' hev' him, jest of his own free will an' accord, be a liar! Young man, truth is the corner-stun o' the temple o' character. Nobody can't put up a good buildin' without a solid foundation; an' you can't do no solid character buildin' with a lie at the base. Man 'at's a liar ain't fit fer nothin'! Can't trust him in no sphere ner relation o' life; ner in any way, shape, ner manner. You passed out yer word like a man, an' like a man I took it an' went off trustin' you, an' you failed me. Like as not that squirrel story wus a lie, too! Hev' you got ary sick friend 'at's needin' squirrel broth?"

The hunter shook his head.

"No? That waan't true neither? I'll own you make me curious. 'Ud you mind tellin' me what wus your idy in cookin' up that squirrel story?"

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The hunter spoke with an effort. "I suppose I wanted to say something to make you feel small," he admitted, in a husky voice.

"You wanted to make me feel small," repeated Abram, wonderingly. "Lord! Lord! Young man, did you ever hear o' a boomerang? It's a kind o' weepin used in Borneo, er Australy, er some o' them furrin parts, an' it's so made 'at the heathens kin pitch it, an' it cuts a circle an' comes back to the feller 'at throwed. I can't see myself, an' I dunno how small I'm lookin'; but I'd ruther lose ten year o' my life 'an to hev' anybody ketch me a-lookin' as little as you do right now. I guess we look a good deal the way we feel in this world. I'm feelin' 'bout the size o' Goliath jest at present; but yer size is sech 'at it hustles me to see any *man* in you at all. An' you wanted to make me feel small! My, oh my! An' you so young yit, too!

"An' if it hadn't a-compassed a matter o' breakin' yer word, what 'ud you wanter kill the redbird fer, anyhow? Who give you rights to go 'round takin' sech beauty an' joy outen the world? Who d'ye think made this world, an' the things 'at's in it? Mebby it's yer idy 'at somebody about yer size whittled it outen

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a block o' wood, scattered a little sand fer airth, stuck a few seeds fer trees, an' started the oceans with a waterin'-pot! I dunno what paved streets an' stall feedin' does fer a man, but any one 'at's lived sixty year on the ground, knows 'at this hull old airth's jest teemin' with work 'at's too big fer anything but a God, an' a mighty *big* God at that!

“ You don't never need bother none 'bout the diskiv-ries o' science, fer if science could prove 'at the airth wus a red hot slag busted off frum the sun 'at balled an' cooled, flyin' through space tel the force o' gravity ketched an' held it, it don't prove what the sun busted off from, ner why it balled an' *didn't* cool. Sky over yer head, airth under foot, trees round you, an' river there,—all full o' life 'at you hain't no mortal right to tech, 'cos God made it, an' it's His! Course, I know 'at He said distinct 'at man wus to hev' 'dominion over the beasts o' the field, an' the fowls o' the air.' An' that means 'at you're free to smash a copper-head ruther'n to let it sting you. Means 'at you better shoot a wolf 'an to let it carry off yer lambs. Means 'at it's right to kill a hawk an' save yer chickens; but God knows 'at shootin' a redbird jest to see the feathers fly ain't hev'in' dominion over nothin'; it's jest makin' a

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plum beast o' *yerself*. Passes me, how you can face up to the Almighty, an' draw a bead on a thing like that! Take's more gall'n I got!

“God never made nothin' purtier 'an that bird, an' He must a-been mighty proud o' the job. Jest cast yer eye on it there! Ever see anything so runnin' over with dainty, purty, coaxin' ways? Leetle red critters, full o' hist'ry too! Ever think o' that? Last year's bird, hatched here-about, like as not. Went south fer winter, an' made friends 'at's been feedin', an' teachin' it to *trust* mankind. Back this spring in a night, an' struck that sumac over a month ago. Broke me all up first time I ever set eyes on it.

“Biggest, reddest redbird I ever see; an' jest a master hand at king's English! Talk plain as you kin! Dunno what he said down south, but you can bank on it, it wus sumpin' purty fine. When he settled here, he wus discoursin' on the weather, an' he talked it out about proper. He'd say, 'Wet year! Wet year!' jest like that! He got the 'wet' jest as good as I kin, an', if he drawed the 'ye-ar' out a leetle, still any blockhead could a-tole what he was sayin', an' in a voice purty an' clear as a bell. Then he got love-sick, an' begged fer comp'ny tel he broke me all up. An' if I'd a-been

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a hen redbird I wouldn't a-been so long comin'. Hed me pulverized in less'n no time! Then a little hen comes 'long, an' stops with him; an' 'twus like an organ playin' prayers to hear 'im tell her how he loved her. Now they've got a nest full o' the cunninest leetle top-knot babies, an' he's splittin' the echoes, yellin' fer the hull community to come see 'em, he's so mortal proud.

“Stake my life he's never been fired on afore! He's purty nigh wild with narvousness, but he's got too much spunk to leave his fam'ly, an' go off an' hide frum critters like you. They's no caution in him. Look at him tearin' 'round to give you another chanct!

“I felt most too rheumatically to tackle field work this spring tel he come 'long, an' the fire o' his coat an' song got me warmed up as I ain't been in years. Work's gone like it wus greast, an' my soul's been singin' fer joy o' life an' happiness ev'ry minute o' the time sence he come. Been carryin' him grub to thet top rail onct an' twict a day fer the last month, an' I kin git in three feet o' him. My wife comes to see him, an' brings him stuff; an' we jest about worship him. Who are you, to come 'long an' wipe out his joy in life, an' our joy in him, fer jest nothin'? You'd a

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left him to rot on the ground, if you'd a hit him ; an' me an' Marier's loved him so !

“ D'you ever stop to think how full this world is o' things to love, if yer heart's jest big enough to let 'em in? We love to live fer the beauty o' the things surroundin' us, an' the joy we take in bein' among 'em. An' it's my belief 'at the way to make folks love us, is fer us to be able to 'preciate what they can do. If a man's puttin' his heart an' soul, an' blood, an' beef-steak, an' bones into paintin' picters, you kin talk farmin' to him all day, an' he's dumb ; but jest show him 'at you see what he's a-drivin' at in his work, an' he'll love you like a brother. Whatever anybody succeeds in, it's success 'cos they so love it 'at they put the best o' theirselves into it ; an' so, lovin' what they do, is lovin' them.

“ It 'ud 'bout kill a painter-man to put the best o' himself into his picter, an' then hev' some feller like you come 'long an' pour turpentine on it jest to see the paint run ; an' I think it must purty well use God up, to figger out how to make an' color up a thing like that bird, an' then hev' you come 'long an' shoot the leetle red heart outen it, jest to prove 'at you kin ! He's the very life o' this river bank. Jest as soon see you dig up





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## The Song of the Cardinal

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the underbresh, an' dry up the river, an' spoil the picter they make against the sky, es to hev' you drap the redbird. He's the red life o' the whole thing! God must a-made him when his heart wus pulsin' hot with love an' the lust o' creatin' incom-*par*-able things; an' He jest saw how purty it 'ud be to dip his featherin' into the blood He was puttin' in his veins.

“To my mind, hain't no better way to love an' worship God, 'an to perfect an' 'preciate these fine gifts He's give fer our joy an' use. Worshipin' that bird's a kind o' religion with me. Gittin' the beauty outen the sky, an' the trees, an' the grass, an' the water 'at God made, is nothin' but doin' Him homage. Hull airth's a sanctuary. You kin worship frum sky above to grass under foot.

“Course, each man hes his pertic'lar altar. Mine's in that cabin up to the bend o' the river. Marier lives there. God never did cleaner work 'an when He made Marier. Lovin' her's sackriment. She's so clean, an' pure, an' honest, an' big hearted! In forty year I've never jest durst brace right up to Marier an' try to put in words what she means to me. Never saw nothin' else as beautiful, ner as good. No flower's as fragrant an' smelly as her hair on her piller. Never

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tapped no bee tree with honey sweet as her lips a-twitchin' with a love quiver. Hain't a bird 'long the ol' Wabash with a voice up to her'n. Love o' God ain't broader'n her kindness. When she's been home to see her folks, I've been so hungry fer her 'at I've gone to her closet an' kissed the hem o' her skeerts more'n onct. I've never yit durst kiss her feet, but I've allus wanted to. I've laid out 'at if she dies first, I'll do it then. An' Marier 'ud cry her eyes out if you'd a-hit the redbird. Yer trappin's look like you could shoot. I guess 'twas God made that shot fly the mark. I guess—"

"If you can stop, for the love of mercy do it!" burst in the hunter. His face was a sickly white, his temples wet with sweat, and his body trembling. "I can't bear any more. I don't suppose you think I've any human instincts at all; but I have a few, and I see the way to arouse more. You probably won't believe me, but I'll never kill another innocent, harmless thing; and I will never lie again as long as I live."

He leaned his gun against the thorn-tree, and dropped the rest of his hunter's outfit beside it on the ground.

"I don't seem a fit subject to 'have dominion,'" he

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said. "I'll just leave those things for you; and thank you for what you have done for me."

There was a crash through the bushes, a leap over the fence, and Abram and the Cardinal were alone.

The old man sat down suddenly on a fallen limb of the sycamore. He was almost dazed with astonishment. He held up his shaking hands, and watched them wonderingly, and then cupped one over each trembling knee to steady himself. He outlined his dry lips with the tip of his tongue, and breathed in heavy gusts. He glanced toward the thorn-tree.

"Left his gun," he hoarsely whispered, "an' it's fine as a fiddle. Lock, stock, an' bar'l jest a-shinin'. An' all that heap o' leather fixin's. Must a-cost a lot o' money. Said he waan't fit to use 'em! Lep the fence like a panther, an' cut dirt acrost the cornfield. An' left me the gun! Well! Well! Well! Wonder what I said? I must a-been almost *fierce*."

"See here! See here!" shrilled the Cardinal.

Abram looked him over carefully. He was quivering with fear, but right as a trivet.

"My! but that wus a close call, ol' feller," said Abram. "Minute later, an' our fun 'ud a-been over, an' the summer jest spiled. Wonder if you knowed

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what it meant, an' if you'll be gun-shy after this. Land knows, I hope so; fer a few more sech doses 'ull jest lay me up."

He gathered himself together at last, set the gun over the fence, and, climbing after it, caught Nancy, who had feasted to plethora on young corn. He fastened up the trace-chains, and, climbing to her back, laid the gun across his lap and rode to the barn. He attended the mare with particular solicitude, and bathed his face and hands in the water trough to make himself a little more presentable to Maria. He started to the house; but had only gone a little way when he stopped, and, after standing in thought a short time, turned back to the barn and gave Nancy another ear of corn.

"After all, it wus all you, ol' girl," he said, patting her shoulder. "I never on airth could a-made it on time afoot."

He was so tired he leaned for support against her, for the unusual exertion and intense excitement were telling on him sorely, and as he rested he confided to her: "I dunno as I wus ever in my life so riled, Nancy. I'm a-feered I wus a leetle mite fierce."

He exhibited the gun, and told the story very soberly

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at supper time ; and Maria was so filled with solicitude over him and the bird, and so indignant at the act of the hunter, that she never said a word about Abram's torn clothing and the hours of patching that would ensue. She sat looking at the gun and thinking intently for a long time ; and then she said pityingly :

“ I dunno jest what you could a-said 'at 'ud make a man go off an' leave a gun like that. Poor feller ! I do hope, Abram, you didn't come down on him too awful strong. Mebby he lost his mother when he was jest a leetle tyke, an' ain't had much teachin'.”

Abram was completely worn out, and went early to bed. Far in the night Maria felt him fumbling about her face in an effort to find if she was covered ; and as he drew the sheet over her shoulder he muttered in worn and sleepy tones : “ I'm a-feerd they's no use denyin' it, Marier, *I wus jest mortal fierce.*”

Down in the sumac the frightened little mother cardinal was hugging her precious babies tight against her breast ; and all through the night she kept calling to her mate, “ Chook ! Chook !” and was satisfied only when an answering “ Chip !” came. As for the Cardinal, he had learned a new lesson. He had never been under fire before. Never again would he trust

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any one that carried a shining thing that belched fire and smoke. He had seen the hunter coming, and had raced home to defend his mate and babies, thus making a brilliant mark of himself; and, as he would not have deserted them, only the arrival of the farmer had averted a tragedy in the sumac. He did not learn to use caution for himself; but, after that, if a gun came down the shining river, he sent a warning "Chip!" to his mate, telling her to crouch low in her nest and keep very quiet, and then, in broken waves of flight, and with chirp and flutter, he exposed himself until he had lured danger from his loved ones.

When the babies grew large enough for their mother to leave them for a short time, she assisted in food hunting, and the Cardinal was not so busy. He then could find time to mount frequently to the top of the dogwood, and cry to the world, "See here! See here!" for the cardinal babies were splendid. But his music was broken, intermittent vocalizing now, often uttered past a beakful of worms, and interspersed with spasmodic "chips" if danger threatened his mate and nestlings.

Despite all their care, it was not so very long until trouble came to the sumac; and it was all because the



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first-born was plainly greedy; much more so than either his little brother or his sister, and was one day ahead of them in strength. He always pushed himself forward, cried the loudest and longest, and so took the greater part of the food carried to the nest; and one day, while he was still quite awkward and wobbly, he climbed to the edge and reached so far that he fell. He rolled down the river bank, splash! into the water; and a hungry old pickerel, sunning himself in the weeds, snapped him up. He made a morsel so fat, sweet, and juicy that the pickerel hung around for a week, waiting to see if there would be any more accidents.

The Cardinal, hunting grubs in the cornfield, heard the frightened cries of his mate, and dashed to the sumac in time to see the poor little ball of brightly tinted feathers go under the water and hear the splash of the fish. He screamed in helpless panic and fluttered over the spot. He watched and waited until he knew there was no hope of the baby's coming up, and then he went to the sumac to try to comfort his mate. She could not be convinced that her baby was gone, and for the rest of the day filled the air with alarm cries and notes of wailing.

The two that remained were surely the envy of Bird-

## The Song of the Cardinal

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land. The male baby was a perfect copy of his big crimson father, only his little coat was gray; but it was so highly tinged with red that it was brilliant, and his beak and feet were really red; and how his crest did flare, and how proud and important he felt, when he found he could raise and lower it at will. His little sister was not nearly so bright as he, and she was almost as greedy as the lost brother. With his father's chivalry he let her crowd in and take the most of the worms and berries, so that she continually looked too full for utterance, yet she was constantly calling for more.

She took the first flight, because she was so greedy she forgot to be afraid, and actually flew to a near-by thorn-tree to meet the Cardinal, coming with a big worm, before she realized what she was doing. For once gluttony had its proper reward. She not only missed the worm, but she got her little self mightily well scared. She clung to the thorn limb, shivering over the depths below, with popping eyes and fear-flattened crest; and it was the greatest comfort when her little brother plucked up courage and came sailing over to her. But, of course, she could not be expected to admit that. When she saw how easily he did it, she flared her crest, turned her head indifferently, and





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asked him if he did not find flying a very easy matter, once he mustered pluck to try it; and she made the poor little soul very much ashamed indeed that he had allowed her to be the first to leave the nest. From the thorn-tree they worked their way to the dead sycamore; but there the lack of foliage made them so conspicuous that their mother almost went into spasms from fright, and she literally drove them back to the sumac.

The Cardinal was so inordinately proud, and made such a brave showing of teaching them to fly, bathe, and all the other lessons of bird babyhood, that it was a great mercy they escaped with their lives; for with all his ability, and the many lessons he had mastered, the one thing the Cardinal never could be taught was, how to be quiet and conceal himself. With explosive "chips" flaming and flashing, he met dangers that sent all the other birds along the shining river racing for cover. Concealment he scorned; and repose he never knew.

It was a summer full of rich experience for the Cardinal. After these first babies were reared and had flown, two more nests were built, and two more broods of babies romped about the sumac. By fall the Cardinal was the father of a small flock, and they were, every one, neat, trim, beautiful river birds.

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He had lived through spring with its perfumed air, bright flowers, and burning heart hunger. He had known summer in its golden mood, with forests pungent with spicebush and sassafras; festooned with wild grape, woodbine, and bittersweet; carpeted with velvet moss and starry mandrake peeping from under green shades; the never-ending murmur of the shining river; and the rich fulfilment of love's fruition.

Now it was fall, and the promises of spring were all accomplished. The woods were glorious in autumnal tints. There were ripened red haws, and black haws, and wild grapes, only waiting for a little more severe frost, nuts rattling down, scurrying squirrels, and bunnies' flash of gray and brown. The waysides were bright with the glory of goldenrod, and royal with the purple of asters and ironwort. There was the rustle of falling leaves, the flutter of velvety butterflies, the whirl of wings trained southward, and the call of the king crow gathering his followers.

Then to the Cardinal came the intuition that it was time to lead his family to the orange orchard. One day they flamed and rioted up and down the shining river, raced over the cornfield, and tilted about the sumac. The next, a black frost had stripped its ant-

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lered limbs. Stark and deserted it stood, a picture of loneliness.

O, bird of wonderful plumage and human-like song! What a precious thought of Divinity to create such beauty and music for our pleasure! Brave songster of the flaming coat, too proud to hide your flashing beauty, too fearless to be cautious of the many dangers that beset you, from the top of the morning we greet you, and hail you King of Birdland, at your imperious command, "See here! See here!"













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