

The Song of the Cardinal

by

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**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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Chapter 1

"Good cheer! Good cheer!" exulted the Cardinal

He darted through 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 playtime. The southern world was filled with brilliant sunshine, gaudy flowers, an abundance of fruit, myriads of insects, and never a thing to do except to 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, yet his crest flared high, his beard was crisp and black, and he was a very prodigy in size and colouring. Fathers of his family that had accomplished many migrations appeared 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 resembles a big 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 as silken fringe in the play of the wind. The birds loll in the shade, peel bark, gather 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 around the edge draw flocks in search of berries, and the marsh grasses and weeds are weighted with seed hunters. The muck is alive with worms; and the whole swamp ablaze with flowers, whose colours and perfumes attract myriads of insects and butterflies.

Wild creepers flaunt their red and gold from the treetops, and the bumblebees and humming-birds make common cause in rifling the honey-laden trumpets. The air around the wild-plum and redhaw trees is vibrant

with the beating wings of millions of wild bees, and the bee-birds feast to gluttony. The fetid odours of the swamp draw insects in swarms, and fly-catchers tumble and twist in 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 clumsily from the logs. Frogs take graceful 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 the birds.

Dainty green warblers nest in its tree-tops, and red-eyed vireos choose a location below. It is the home of bell-birds, finches, and thrushes. There are flocks of blackbirds, 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 on silent wing; whippoorwills set up a plaintive 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 the surrounding country for food. The boom of the bittern resounds all day, and above it the rasping 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 colour is more brilliant than that of the gaudiest flower lifting its face to light and air. The lilies of the mire are not so white as the white herons that fish among them. The ripest spray of goldenrod is not so highly coloured 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 other birds, but their brilliant colouring and the fearless disposition make them seem so.

The Cardinal was hatched in a thicket of sweetbrier 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, king-birds, 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 in her heart she felt transient fears of her lordly master, she gave no 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 nest builder of more experience. It would be difficult for snakes and squirrels to penetrate that briery thicket. The white berry blossoms scarcely had ceased to attract a swarm of insects before the sweets of the roses recalled them; by the time they had faded, luscious big berries ripened within reach and drew food hunters. She built with far more than ordinary care. It was a beautiful nest, not nearly so carelessly made as those of her kindred all through 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 in nest-building, and she so far surpassed herself on that occasion 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 mate in defense of this egg, for it was so unusually large that he could not be persuaded short of force that some sneak of the feathered tribe had not slipped 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 increased their prospects by laying three others. After that the king made up his mind that she was a most remarkable bird, and went away pleasure-seeking; but the queen settled to brooding, a picture of joyous faith and contentment.

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 there was the individual pressure that distinguished it from the others. It was the first to hatch, of course, and the queen felt that she had enough if all the others failed her; for this egg pipped with a resounding pip, and before the silky down was really dry on the big terracotta body, the young Cardinal arose and lustily demanded food.

The king came to see him and at once acknowledged subjugation. He was the father of many promising cardinals, yet he never had seen one like this. He set the Limberlost echoes rolling with his jubilant rejoicing. He unceasingly hunted for the ripest berries and seed. He stuffed that baby from morning until night, and never came with food that he did not find him standing a-top the others calling for more. The queen was just as proud of him and quite as foolish in her idolatry, but she kept tally and gave the remainder every other worm in turn. They were unusually fine babies, but what chance has merely a fine baby in a family that possesses a prodigy? The Cardinal was as large as any two of the other nestlings, and so red 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 to hop on a limb. He surprised his parents by finding a slug, and winged his first flight to such a distance that his adoring mother almost went into spasms lest his strength might fail, and he would fall into the swamp and become the victim of a hungry old turtle. He returned safely, however; and the king was so pleased he hunted him an unusually ripe berry, and perching before him, gave him his first language lesson. Of course, the Cardinal knew how to cry "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 call "Chip," and the females "Chook." In fact, he learned so rapidly and was generally so observant, that before the king thought it wise to give the next lesson, he found him on a limb, his beak closed, his throat swelling, 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 more days, 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 always should meet a storm head first, so that the water would run as the plumage lay.

His first bathing lesson was a pronounced success. The Cardinal enjoyed water like a duck. He bathed, splashed, and romped until his mother was almost crazy for fear he would attract a watersnake or turtle; but the

element of fear was not a part 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 such 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 around the swamp, and taught him to select the proper places to hunt 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. "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 alone through the Limberlost; and so impressive were his proportions, and so aggressive his manner, 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 explored the swamp thoroughly, a longing for a wider range grew upon him; and day after day he lingered around the borders, looking 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 the late summer set the marsh steaming, and the Cardinal, flying close to the borders, caught the breeze from the upland; and the vision of broad fields stretching toward the north so enticed him that he spread his wings, and following the line of trees and fences as much as possible, he made his first journey from home. That day was so delightful it decided his fortunes. It would seem that the swamp, so appreciated by his kindred, should 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 endless panorama of waving corn fields, 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 to the river, the Cardinal saw many birds feeding there, so he alighted 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 of nectar and ambrosia. He lifted his head when he came to the golden kernel, and chipping it 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 fly even farther. But he had gone only a short distance 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 and rocked with the wind; and the Cardinal did not know what it was. Filled with wonder he dropped lower and lower. Birds were everywhere, many flying over 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 Waca-co-nah from the Salamonie and Mississinewa; the river beneath whose silver sycamores and giant maples Chief Godfrey pitched his campfires, was never more beautiful than on that perfect autumn day.

With his feathers pressed closely, the Cardinal alighted 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 appeared 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 arose to his full height with a dexterous little side step, and the other bird straightened and side-stepped exactly with him. This was too insulting for the Cardinal. Straining every muscle, he made a dash at the impudent stranger.

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 rolled forth rattling laughter, until his voice reechoed 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 shame, but he would not be laughed into leaving. He found it too delightful. In a short time he ventured down and took a sip, 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 splashed and splashed, and sent the silver drops flying! How he ducked and soaked and cooled in that rippling water, in which he might remain as long as he pleased and splash his fill; for he could see the bottom for a long distance all around, and easily could avoid anything attempting to harm him. He was so wet when his bath was finished he scarcely could reach a bush to dry and dress his plumage.

Once again in perfect feather, he remembered the bird of the water, and returned 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 in 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 sweep, and twisted and flirted his tail. He went over 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, something else caught his attention. When he "chipped" there was an answering "Chip" 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 favourite little sister who 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. "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 ever had 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 for 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 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 awoke him singing, "Cheer up! Cheer up!" and he answered with a sleepy "Cheer! Cheer! Cheer!" 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 awakened, shouted lustily, "Good Cheer! Good Cheer!" and after that it was only a short time until he was on his way toward the shining river. It was better than before, and every following day found him feasting in the corn field and bathing in the shining water; but he always returned to his family at nightfall.

When black frosts began to strip the Limberlost, and food was almost reduced to dry seed, there came a day on which the king marshalled his followers and gave the magic signal. With 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 short 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 following morning, a golden-haired little girl and an old man with snowy locks came hand in hand through the orchard. The child saw the redbird and immediately claimed him, 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 odours, 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 that 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. Soon they became such friends that when he saw them approaching he would call softly "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 pursued 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 odour. The Cardinal lifted his head and whistled an inquiring note. He was not certain, and went on searching for slugs, and predicting happiness in full round notes: "Good Cheer! Good Cheer!" Again the odour 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!"

The breeze was coming stiffly and steadily now, unlike anything the Cardinal ever had 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 subtle odour 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 filled to overflowing; breaking up the ice and carrying a load of refuse, it went rolling to the sea. The ice and snow had 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 to light and warmth. Thrusting aside the mold and leaves above them, spring beauties, hepaticas, and violets 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 shades 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 beside roadways, and blanketing 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. The 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. In the upland the smoke was curling over sugar-camp and clearing; in the forests animals were rousing 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 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' year! Spring o' year!"; while stilt-legged little killdeers were scudding around the Limberlost and beside the river, flinging from cloudland their "Kill deer! Kill deer!" call. The robins in the orchards were pulling the long dried blades of last year's grass from beneath the snow to line their mud-walled cups; 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 weatherbeaten, rotting old rails were the very colour of the busy 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 shining river, the fields and forests, the wayside bushes and fences, the stumps, logs, 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 place.

There was intoxication in the air. The subtle, pungent, ravishing odours 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.

The north wind, sweeping from icy fastnesses, caught this odour of spring, and carried it to the orange orchards and Everglades; and at a breath of it, crazed with excitement, the Cardinal went flaming through 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 around, nervous with dread of the unknown, and palpitant with delightful expectation; but with the coming of dusk he began his journey northward.

When he passed the Everglades, he winged his way slowly, and repeatedly sent down a challenging "Chip," but there was no answer. 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 before him. The Cardinal flew steadily in a straight sweep, until with a throb of triumph in his heart, he arose in his course, and from far overhead, flung down a boastful challenge to the king and his followers, as he sailed above 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 the loved water; then he flew into a fine old stag sumac and tucked his head under his wing for a short rest. He

had made the long flight 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!"

Chapter 2

"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 appear 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.

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 densely wooded slope, and the shining river went singing between grassy banks, whitened with spring beauties, below it. Crowded around it were thickets of papaw, wild grape-vines, thorn, dogwood, and red haw, that attracted bug and insect; and just across the old snake fence was a field of mellow mould sloping to the river, that soon would be plowed for corn, turning out numberless big fat grubs.

He was compelled almost hourly to wage 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 had passed. He had little trouble with the robins. They were easily conquered, and with small protest settled a rod up the bank in a wild-plum tree; but the air was thick with "chips," chatter, and red and black feathers, 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 really had wanted from the first.

The Cardinal was left boasting and strutting in the sumac, but in his heart he found it lonesome business. Being the son of a king, he was much too

dignified to beg 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 around 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. As for the doves that were already brooding on the line fence beneath the maples, the Cardinal was torn between two opinions.

He was alone, he was love-sick, and he was holding the finest building location beside the shining river for his mate, and her slowness in coming made their devotion difficult to endure when he coveted a true 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 dignified Quaker mate stuffed to discomfort; he clung to the side of the nest trying to help brood until he almost crowded her from the eggs. He pestered her with caresses and cooed over his love-song until every chipmunk on the line fence was familiar with his story. The Cardinal's temper was worn to such a fine edge that he darted at the dove one day and pulled a big tuft of feathers from his back. 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 young females fresh from their long holiday, and big boastful males appearing their brightest and bravest, each singer almost splitting his throat in the effort to captivate the 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 fiercely when they discovered that the females they were wooing favoured their rivals and desired only to be friendly with them.

The heart of the Cardinal sank as he watched. 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 feathered females! How they coquetted! How they flirted! How they sleeked and flattened their plumage, and with half-open beaks and sparkling eyes, hopped closer and closer as if charmed. The eager

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