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The Catbird

Mary Graham Bonner

"Tell me what happened, Mr. Catbird," said Billie Brownie.

"Well," said the catbird, settling comfortably on the fence, "I was sitting right here, and some children were playing in the yard nearby. While they played, I made all sorts of sounds—just like a cat. You know how I can do it?"

"I most certainly do," said Billie Brownie.

"They didn't know where the cat could be, and they started to look. I nearly fell off the fence laughing when they went searching—under the old tree, by the cellar stairs, everywhere. And then, just when they were peering into every corner, I did it again.



"Well, I'm sure I heard a cat that time,' they kept saying to one another.

"I truly, honestly nearly fell off the fence. Then they came back to their games, and noticed me sitting here, beak shut tight, looking for all the world as if I hadn't made a sound in my life.

"All I can see,' said one of them, 'is that gray bird with the black cap.'

"Exactly. I was the one making all the sounds—and they never suspected.

"Later they began digging in the garden, transplanting lettuce and hoeing beans, and I started singing like the other birds—a different bird every few minutes. And they would stop and turn to each other: 'What song is that? What bird could that be?'

"They looked all around and couldn't find any birds at all—because hardly any were about just then—and there I sat, looking perfectly quiet and meek.

"I still don't see any creature,' one of them said at last, 'but that gray bird.'

"I thought surely they'd worked it out. But they hadn't. They went home not knowing I could mimic a cat, or sing like the other birds, or even imitate a mockingbird when I'm in the mood. And they're still wondering—where was that cat? And where were all those invisible birds?

"Ha, ha, ha! To think I fooled them all."

"You're a smart bird, there's no mistake about it," said Billie Brownie admiringly.

"I fooled them, I fooled them," chirped the catbird, swaying on his fence. "They didn't know the catbird when they saw him—and they didn't know him when they heard him either!"

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