

Once upon a fairy time lived a lovely robin friend of mine. Like most such tales this one starts at the beginning, so sit back my friend as I tell you of Mariah and her very special fledgling.

She lived happy, she lived free, nestled in the branches of a happy oak tree. On this day Mariah sat upon her nest with her blue-green egg under her soft downy breast. From here she could view the coming season, of the changing leaf colors she knew there was a reason. From cabin chimney's smoke spewed and morning leaves and branches were filled with autumn dew. The Indian Summer was over, and Mariah knew winter would soon be there. She knew of winter chill. It was a cold that could freeze; a cold that could kill. And she knew that the hazards to her precious egg were real.

The other robins had flown south to where it was warm. There was no winter chill there to cause them any harm. Food could be found everywhere and Mariah too wished that she could fly down there. The other robins asked her to go with them and some even begged; but Mariah would not leave behind her lone precious egg.

She sat and she wondered and knew not what to do, and that's when it happened, that's when her egg moved. Mariah watched excitedly as her chick struggled to break free. A daughter was soon born and nestled against her mother all warm, snug and cozy.

Mariah looked lovingly into her little daughter's eyes, "Welcome to the world little one I am your mother Mariah. In this world there is much to beware, but do not worry for I will take care." The little chick gazed at her mother as if she understood every word and of course she did, for that is the way of all little birds.

Mariah continued speaking to her "I love you little Dear. I have named you Avina and you are my daughter."

Avina smiled up at her, she liked her name and she loved her mother.

Every Robin has a song that they learn from their mother. It is a song that has been passed down through each and every ancestor. Each morning when the day had just begun, Mariah sang her song to welcome the rising sun. With her song sung, she set off for food to hunt. Insects and seeds were hard to find, in fact there was not much of anything around upon which she could dine. But Mariah did have some luck, for two children had put some seed out in a little brown coffee cup. Other birds dined on those seeds as well, which left Mariah with scarcely a belly full. With those seeds and a few berries, Mariah was barely able to meet Avina's needs.

Avina grew bigger and stronger with the passing of days. She loved to stand at the edge of her nest, soak up the sun, and watch all the animals play. She saw people start their day and her mother flitter about on food gathering forays. She was stuck in the nest, but she dreamed of a day when she too could fly about and play.

Avina often heard the beautiful songs of the remaining birds. Some of the songs made her feel lonesome like the "Swee-swee-tee-tee" of the Mountain Chickadee. A Hermit Thrush landed on a branch next to her and sang, "Don't fret Dearie; cheer, cheer, cheerily cheer", then flew off to her home for the winter. A Western Tanager sang a melodious tune that grew higher in pitch with notes paired in twos. But of all of the songs, she liked her

mother's song the best. And Avina practiced it whenever Mariah was away from the nest.

One morning Mariah started to sing her morning song, when to her surprise Avina sang along. When the song was over, Mariah looked down proudly at her daughter.

"To this song you have listened carefully. It is the song that I too, learned as a little chickadee."

Avina smiled back. "Mother, I love our song too. And of all the birds in the forest not one can sing as well as you."

"Yes" replied Mariah, "Our song is wonderful, but there are other birds around that can sing just as well. In fact there are these Mockingbirds, who can listen to my song and then sing it back even better. With some notes an octave higher and some an octave lower; it is embarrassing to listen to another bird sing my song so much better."

"Mother, aren't there any robins that can that can sing as well as those rude Mockingbirds?"

Mariah thought for a moment. "Many years ago a tale is told, of a robin who could sing so well, that all the creatures that heard fell silent and very still. That when a Mockingbird heard it and tried, they just couldn't do it so they would break down and cry."

Avina smiled and exclaimed, "Singing is my favorite thing! I don't care if I am the best singer or not. I sing because I love it a lot."

Mariah stared into the western sky deep in contemplation. A cold wind had started to blow and dark clouds were heading their direction. Singing is one of the three great joys that a bird's life was meant to see. That Avina had experienced the joy of singing, made Mariah very happy. But her eyes filled with tears, she didn't know if Avina would even make it through the year. The joys of flight and springtime might go unrealized, for Mariah knew that with winter, Avina would most likely die.

The approaching storm would bring snow that would cover everything with a cool blanket. It would be cold and food would be much harder for everyone to get. Without enough food Avina would not have a chance. She would never live to see the spring flowers, or take to the wind with her wings and dance.

Avina saw tears in her mothers' eyes and knew something was not right. She snuggled close to her mom, gave her a big hug with her little wings and held on tight. "Don't worry Mom; everything will be alright."

Mariah smiled at Avina through her tears. She knew she could not just sit around drowning in her fears. She was determined to save her daughter, but that meant finding enough food for her. She kissed Avina on the beak and then set off to hunt food for the both of them to eat. A few weeks earlier the forest had been filled with yummy insects, berries and seeds. But now there was not enough to meet her and Avina's needs. In fact she could find nothing, just a few seeds outside a cabin. There just wasn't enough food now to raise a little robin.

Frustrated, down to the brook Mariah flew. Then a friendly old squirrel scampered up beside her that she knew.

"Howdy Mariah", drawled old Douglas. "I just moseyed down here to get me a few more acorns before the storm hits us."

"Douglas", Mariah sighed, "it's good to see you ... hi."

About Mariah's troubles, that was something Douglas knew, and he knew the approaching storm would make things worse for Mariah too.

"Yah know Mariah, I heard tell of a place down in the valley, where people raise these big white bird with little bitsy brains. These birds, chickens I think they call 'em, are fed a special grain. This grub it makes 'em grow fast but it may be dangerous a bit. In fact some grow so quick, they start to flappin' their wings and fall over deader than granite. Now this food may be a bit risky, but I think perhaps you should fly, on down there and give 'r a try."

Mariah's eyes brightened. She too, had heard of these birds that did very little thinking. She had even flown over their long rectangular houses when she flew up to the mountains this past spring. It would only take a couple of hours to fly there on this morn, and if she left now she could be back well before the storm. And if she could do this every day, Avina might grow strong enough to where she could fly away. They could leave the cold mountains and fly, then little Avina would live and would not die.