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# JUNIOR NATURALISTS

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"Ha, ha, ha ha ha! You can't catch me," laughed Mark Magpie.

The big farm dog leapt high into the air. Mark dodged sideways just in time.

"Thief! Thief! Thief!" barked the dog at the top of his lungs.

Mark circled a little higher. "Hey, take it easy. Just think how bored you'd be on these cold winter mornings without me. Come on. Catch me if you can." Mark Magpie dove straight down at the dog's food bowl. He grabbed a scrap of meat and took off.

The dog lunged at Mark and missed. Mark headed for the trees, but he stayed low enough and slow enough to give the dog some fun. After a wild run, the dog headed back to the yard with its tail wagging.

Phillipa Fox was waiting for Mark on the far side of the bluff.

"Hey, there's my foxy lady friend, foxy lady in her lovely winter coat sitting sweetly in the snow," babbled Mark.

"Don't you think you're going to sweat talk me, Mark Magpie," said Phillipa. "You think you're so brave! One of these days you're going to get into trouble on that game."

"Who, me?" asked Mark, innocently cleaning his shining blue-black tail.

"Yes, you," Phillipa said. "You know people don't like wild things in their yards."

"They do, do, do," said a bright voice over their heads. "At least they love me, me, me. I'm Dee Chickadee, dee, dee."



"Oh! Hi," said Phillipa, looking up. "It's nice to see a bird besides Mark Magpie who isn't afraid of a little cold."

"Nope, nobody can call me chicken," interrupted Mark. "I don't fly south with the other chickens."

All of a sudden the whole bush was full of tiny giggles. "Tsee, tsee, tsee," even chickadees were laughing at Mark. Even chickadees know chickens don't fly south.

"So, why do you all think people like you?" asked Phillipa Fox, trying to get back on the subject.

"Come and see, see, see," they called. The whole flock took off over the bluff to the house.

Phillipa went and sat just inside the bushes. She could see the house, but nobody could see her. Mark flew right to the yard to watch.

A girl came out of the back door. She took some little black things out of a bag and held them out on her mitten. Then she stood absolutely still.

What happened next made Mark Magpie almost fall right out of his tree. The Chickadee had landed on the girl's mitten.

Mark remembered his wings and hopped over to Phillipa. "That's no chickadee, chickadee. Did you see Dee do that? Did you see what Dee did?"

Little giggles told the two friends the chickadees were back.

"I dee, dee, did that because she had see, see, seeds for us," said Dee. "See, see, I told you they like us. She filled up the bird feeder for us."

"We, we like them too," said the other tiny voices. "You see, see, on cold days we need to eat to stay warm. We can starve in a day with no food. So we'll visit anyone who puts out good sunflower see, see, seeds for us."

"I thought you saved seeds from summer and ate butterfly eggs and things," said Phillipa.

"Oh, we do, do, do," said all the little voices. One chickadee hung upside down and pecked some eggs off the bottom of a twig to prove it.

"But we like sunflower see, see, seeds," explained Dee. "They really help on cold, cold days."

Phillipa laughed. The chickadee looked so cute hanging upside down. "Those eggs won't turn into tent caterpillars next spring. Keep it up. Hey, Mark Magpie, I think these little guys are smarter and braver than you."

"Cheeky chicken chickadee," screeched Mark, and turned his back on them.

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