

GENE STRATTON-PORTER



THE SONG OF
THE CARDINAL

The Song of
the Cardinal

GENE STRATTON-PORTER

The Song of the Cardinal, G. Stratton-Porter
Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck
86450 Altenmünster, Loschberg 9
Deutschland

ISBN: 9783849648619

www.jazzybee-verlag.de
admin@jazzybee-verlag.de

CONTENTS:

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

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.