



BELON THE : : HAWK

A Nature Story

By CLIVE R. FENN

A FIERCE enough fellow was Belon the Hawk when abroad, but as mild as milk in his own home. His wife, whose name was Fratilla, generally preferred to have her own way, and everybody was accustomed to sing small when in her presence. Fratilla insisted on taking a battered old crow's nest with all the fittings as a home for the season.

Belon said he would have been better pleased with a belfry. He declared a belfry was safer, and much healthier; but his wife gained the day, also the crow's nest, and this was really a most serious and unwelcome circumstance for Greenside Village. The crows who had built the nest had done the work remarkably well, and the village had not minded a bit the proximity of crows which, though untidy birds and rather dismal companions, are not specially dangerous.

The crow's nest was safe and lofty, being situated in an inaccessible fork of a very

ancient oak, and here the hawk family lived in security. Belon was quite willing to admit that his wife's choice was a good one, but it was otherwise down in the village, where a number of inhabitants came to dread the sound of the hawk's note.

Belon was mighty proud of the fact that his voice was much like that of the king of birds, the swooping eagle. It was not so really, but it was his weakness to think it. Yet his note was shrill and piercing enough to strike terror into the hearts of the hens and ducks of the poultry yards down below in the village.

"They are grumbling no end," said Belon to his wife one day when he swept back home, bearing a plump little duckling which had hardly learned to waddle, being too fluffy and young.

"Hawks must live," was Fratilla's snappy reply. That was where some of the victims



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of the hawk's depredations joined issue with the enemy. Why should a hawk live? The village had been happy enough before; it was not at all happy now. You never knew what would happen, and when this state of uncertainty prevails nerves are apt to get frayed at the edges. Many a good dame trembled for her brood, for day after day Belon, the relentless hawk, was descried flying overhead, his keen gaze on the cluster of little red cottages in the valley beneath.

There had been trouble before in the place, of course. The elder birds well remembered the frightful commotion when a boisterous company of magpies had stormed the headquarters of a harmless missel-thrush, a much-respected resident. The green and gold kingfishers down by the waterside shook their heads together; they did not like the business of the hawk. It gave the village a bad name. There were plenty of tiny watervoles. Belon could have had

for the asking—which, of course, is merely a way of speaking, for it does not mean it would have been any use asking the water vole whether he cared to leave his cosy home at the foot of the alder, and furnish a supper for a hawk.

Now, it has to be remembered that all that countryside had long been regarded as a sanctuary for birds. It was not merely that the tiny chickens and the ducklings pecking

round the farmyards were in constant danger; smaller creatures than they were in deadly peril. The whole peace of the place had gone.

The rooks in their parliament house in the towering elms and beeches of Halyard Park bitterly resented the intrusion. Until that crow's nest had been leased by the hawks they had been the aristocrats of the district. Problems were brought before them, and these difficulties were debated in full assembly with much clatter.

"I move," said one rook, "that these hawks be turned out."

Another speaker tried to be funny, and said he did not care about the claws, but he was promptly ruled out of order. A letter from a blackbird complaining about the state of affairs was laid on the chairman's table. There it was likely to remain. The tragic business went on. Small feathers, saddening traces of disaster, were seen every day. Greenside Village was no



Belon had the voice and speed of a swooping eagle, and many fell victim to his claws.

longer a bird sanctuary—but at last Belon went too far.

Mr. Septimus Miller, who lived at the Grange, loved birds. His garden was a green lawn of wonderful beauty. The cedars surrounding this part of his property were renowned. Mr. Miller was elderly and a student. He used to write learned treatises about birds. He knew all their ways and habits, and as he owned some hundreds of acres and would

never have a bird shot, not even at seed time, or when the blackbirds gobbled up all the strawberries long before they were ripe, it may be imagined that the district was pretty thickly populated with birds. Cats were driven away into the next parish.

Mr. Miller had troops of cheery water wag-tails hopping round his terrace; martins and swifts were numerous; the sparrows were as plentiful as the apples in the orchard. As time went on the old bird lover said that the hawks must go. He was not a sportsman, not in the sense that he went out to shoot birds, but he kept a gun.

"These hawks must go," he said, as he watched for Belon day after day.

The hawk saw him right enough, and told Fratilla.

"I am beginning to think this place is unhealthy," he said.

"Coward!" retorted his wife scornfully. "You are afraid. That man can't shoot for nuts."

That was true enough but, all the same, the bad day came for Belon. He was flying steadily back home with more plunder when he heard a sound which resembled a small clap of thunder. It was terrific, and it did not end there. Came a second report, and one of his wings jarred. It was as though he were an aircraft and a plane had been clipped. The hawk stiffened his wings and flew on, but a third shot caused him to pitch badly, and drop a score of feet. It was only air concussion: he recovered himself, and, wheeling in a half-circle, regained his home.

"That's enough for me, we are going," he said to Fratilla.

For once he had his way.

THE END.

THREE FAMOUS GREYFRIARS CHARACTERS



Captain Harry Wharton



Billy Bunter



Alonzo Todd