

THE TITMOUSE FAMILY



BY IVY FLOYD

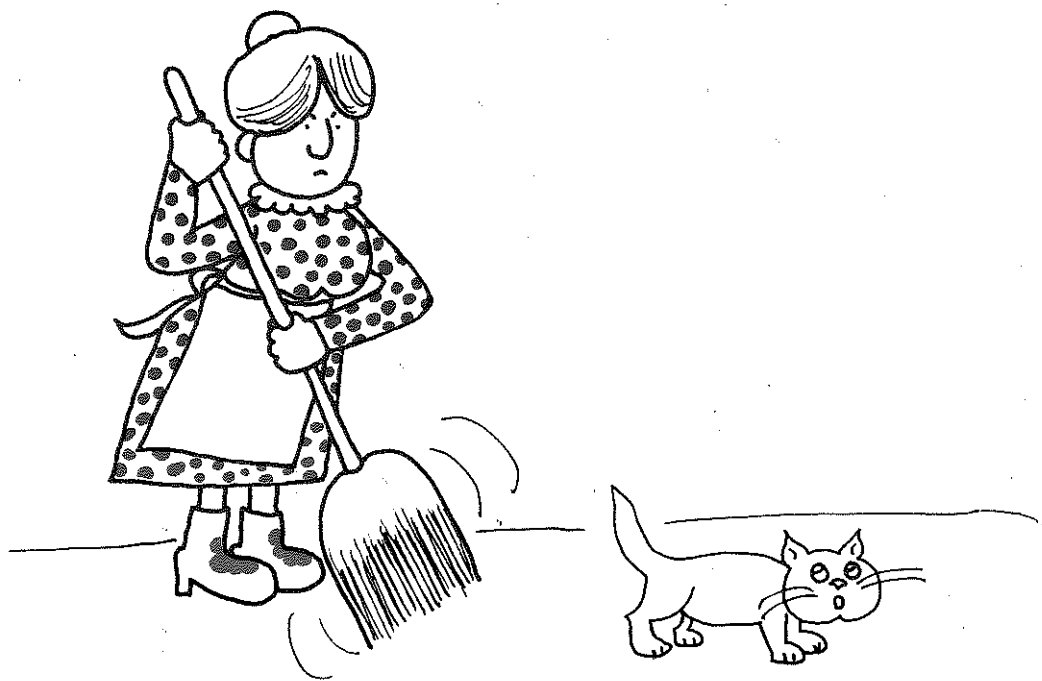
I wish to dedicate this book to my wife Ellen, for 40 plus years of caring for birds, seeing that there was grain in the feeder and plenty of water and doctoring sick and crippled ones. She has given untold hours helping little wild creatures who could not help themselves.

Illustrated By:

Sylvia Brown and Ivy Floyd

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My name is Burnside Titmouse. My mate's name is Blossom. We live among the trees on the grounds of an old college in a small southern town. On the edge of the campus is a small clearing and a tiny house surrounded by all kinds of trees and shrubs. Two old people live here and we have adopted them. We have named the little old lady Grandma Catchaser, because the first time we saw her, she was chasing a cat with a broom. Boy, do we love that little old lady! We don't have to worry about cats around here. We named the old man Grandpa Workmore. He



works at some kind of job on the campus. We don't see much of him in the morning. We usually see him going out to work, and in the evening we see him coming back to the house. Once in a while we see him piddling and puttering around the yard. Sometimes he will put out some bread crumbs. But most of the time in the evening, he will just sit in the shade on the back porch and doze and mumble something to Grandma Catchaser as she flits here and there doing this and that, telling him about the events of the day. With a setup like this we decided to make use of it.





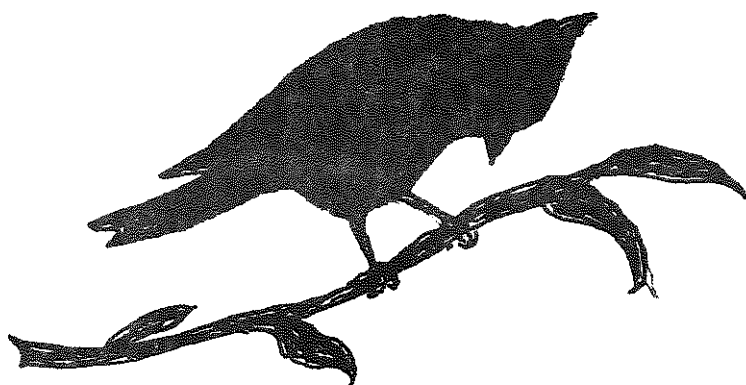
The first thing Blossom and I did was to find a good place for a nest in a large tree. We found a huge sycamore tree just across a little stream in a pine thicket. In one of the limbs was an old abandoned woodpecker nest. With some work and re-arranging this made a safe place to begin a family. We began to work on our nest, and soon had the outside finished. All that was left to do was to line the next with some soft material.

The weather was beautiful, and there were a few early buds here and there on our tree. It was all I could do to keep from singing a note or two. Suddenly, we discovered a pair of strange eyes watching us from further up the limb.

The limb was hollow for some distance up toward the top. We discovered the eyes belonged to a Red-Headed Skink. I knew that Mr. Skink would not harm us, but after our babies arrived he might chase a roach or some kind of bug and accidentally run through our home and hurt some of them. After looking over the limb, I discovered a thin rotten place just above friend Skink's home. Now for some action. It was a mean trick to pull on Mr. Skink, but something had to be done. While Blossom was searching for fuzz from some old thistles or some down from an old feather pillow which we had found in Grandpa Workmore's tool and junk shed, I would try to work a hole through the rotten place over Mr. Skink's place of abode. This would allow the rain to come in and force him to find a new home. I would work a while and sing a while, and look in on Blossom's project. She was finding plenty of warm, soft lining for our nest.

I had worked very hard and had about succeeded in making the opening when Blossom flew by with good news that Grandpa Workmore had put out a pan of food. Blossom and I went to investigate this pan. Sure enough, it was loaded with crumbs and seed.

Well, what a feast we had. We could see Grandma Catchaser and Grandpa Workmore resting on the back porch. Grandpa was peacefully smoking his pipe and Grandma was chattering away as usual. Everything was so peaceful that we flew a little closer for a better view of things. We flew to some low hanging limbs close to the porch. When Grandma Catchaser happened to see us, she hushed blabbering and began to whisper, "Look, Jim, at those cute little birds. I do believe they are the same kind that nested in our mail box years ago back on the farm." Grandpa Workmore slowly opened his eyes, quit puffing on his pipe, and moved a little for a better view. "By Jove, Mary, you're right. That's them all right." Blossom and I decided to look still closer. We went along the other side of the house and looked in a window; inside were two light blue birds and two or three green ones. They were making more fuss than a bunch of Redwing Blackbirds. In another window on the sunny side of the house were two little yellow birds sitting on the window sill. One was singing a beautiful little trilling song. The other one was peacefully preening itself and making a little chirping sound

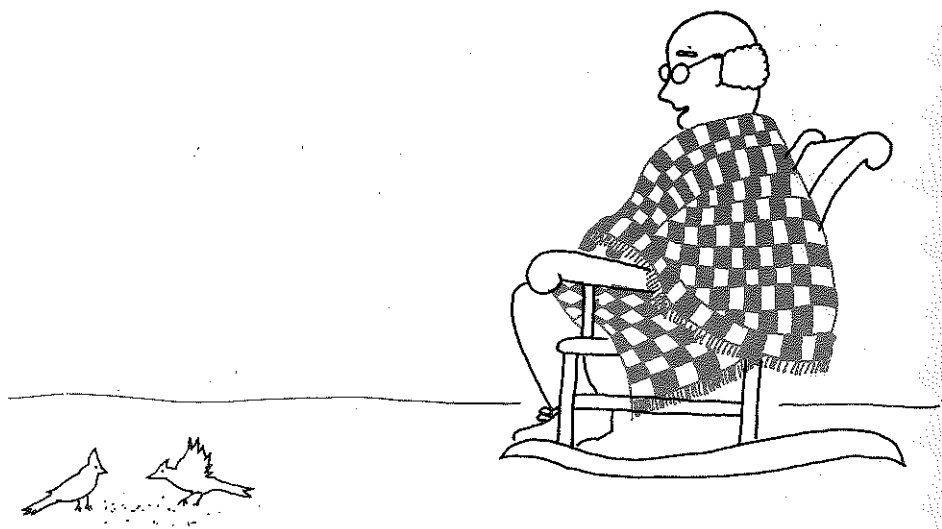


and we said, "Ho, Ho, spring is making itself felt by everyone." Blossom and I planned to watch Grandma Catchaser and Grandpa Workmore to see what effect it had on them, if any. Blossom chirped, "I wonder if spring effects old folks too." I can not see how they can stand a bunch of chattering, squeaking, singing, flying, racket-making birds loose in the house. Just think what will happen to Grandma's Easter curtains. Oh, well, it must be love.

It was almost night, so we stopped by the crumb pan for supper as we went by on our way home. It was such a beautiful

night. There must have been a million stars, and the lovely full moon was coming up over the trees in the east. Moonbeams were shimmering across the little lake and dancing among the trees with every flitting breeze. Everything was too beautiful to describe and too lovely to leave. Everything has its place and purpose in this old world. But Blossom had had a very hard day, so with a last look and a few notes of a song, we went to bed. And then it was dawn and another day. "Oh, beautiful day, Oh happy day, when I was young with no cares, I would play and sing, tweet, tweet, sweet, sweet, sing, sing, sing." However, now I had the unwelcome task of dislodging old Skinkie boy. I had to work very carefully at pecking away the limb, so that Skinkie, who was sleeping below, would not wake up. It seemed to be an impossible job and after pulling and tugging for hours I still was not making much progress. The shadows of evening began to fall. Well, I had done a little maybe. I had succeeded in making the limb very thin and had made a crack through which you could see Skinkie sleeping soundly. I surely needed a rest, so I decided to look over some new trees and shrubs that the

college grounds crew had planted back in the winter. All of a sudden you never heard such a racket since the dawn of time. It was our neighbor Red-Headed Woodpecker looking for grubs, and letting his lady love know where he was. Now he was checking the limb where we and our neighbor had our home. And then he began another siege of hammering. I flew back up to the top branches of the great old sycamore where I had a commanding view of the action. Old Red has a reputation of getting into things and doing things that don't seem to be necessary. Squeal! Squeal! Now



what? You never saw such fluttering and backing up as Old Hammer-head flew by where I was. He looked like a red and black streak and kept on flying up. I never saw a woodpecker fly so high in all my life. And there went Skinkie like a bullet down the limb through Blossom's nest, kicking and scattering it everywhere. On down the tree and into the woods Mr. Skink went, heading toward an old barn where I hoped he would stay. Actually what happened was that old hard head Woodpecker was hopping along checking every likely place for a new nest or some food. He chanced to look in the crack I had just made and spied Skinkie's pink tender backside. "What a nice plump and juicy grub," he thought. And then he popped his sharp needle-point beak right through the opening and into Skink's tender bottom. Oh, what a commotion! But now it looks like we will have some peace and quiet around here for a long time.

After a lot of hard work, we managed to put our nest back in shape again. The days got rather hot, and the nights were warmer. The trees leaved out, the flowers were in full bloom. The Spring was so beautiful. Sing, sing, sing. Sing a song of spring.

With summer almost here there were hordes of insects and bugs.

Our babies arrived, too--four of the ugliest, stringy-necked little things you ever saw. I have to confess that Blossom and I really thought they were beautiful.

With the new babies we had to be careful. The men on the grounds crew sprayed some of the shrubbery with the illest smelling fog you ever sniffed; we had to protect our new family. And now we had to buckle down to work, with four mouths to feed. What appetites they had. I believe Blossom worked harder than I did. How we appreciated the tidbits we got from our old friends. We always looked forward to taking our skraggly hungry brood up to get acquainted with Grandma and Grandpa. Bless them it looked like they knew when we needed them most.

By early summer, the children were all decked out with an almost complete covering, including their head crests. My, but they were beautiful. They were about ready to make their first flight. They usually do this in the order that they make their appearance in this world. The first to appear was a girl; we named her Petunia, and next to appear was also a girl. We named her Azalea. And then came the two boys. We named the

first one Buckeye and the last one was Pinecone. The sun was shining bright, and the weather was hot and humid. The children began to chirp and twitter and become restless. They can be a bother.

Blossom and I decided to go down to the little creek for a drink and a dip in the cool water. Just as we flew, out came little Petunia and headed for Gram's house. I flew along to see where she landed. Grandma Catchaser was out in the yard picking a bouquet. Petunia landed in a large Cape Jasmine bush just over the old girl's head. Blossom called; I looked around. She was flying around in circles trying to herd the other three scoundrels into a group of myrtle bushes. For they had all left the nest at about the same time. Little Pinecone landed in a cherry tree in the edge of the yard. Little Azalea and Buckeye lit in the myrtle bushes. Grandma was so carried away she just quit picking her flowers, laid it down, and looked at our children. When Grandpa came to lunch, she had to show him every one of them. She did not have to twist his arm either to get him to look at them.

For lunch Grandma brought a platter with some goodies and

something to drink, and the old folks just sat on the back porch and watched us and talked and nibbled on some crackers and sipped their kool aid. This wasn't going to be a bad day after all. Grandma watched our children closely until Grandpa came home from work. He took over until dark. Now the children's wings were strong, and they had found their balance and gained confidence. There was a lot of work to do this summer. We had to train them to take care of themselves; we had to teach them to be careful of the shrubbery that had been sprayed for insects, to watch out for all known enemies, and to know how and when to prepare for winter.

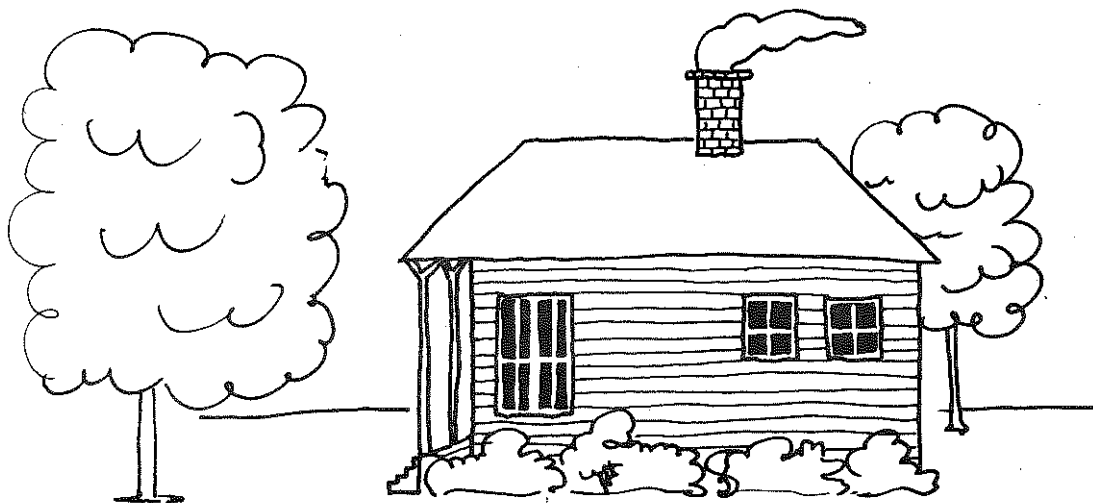
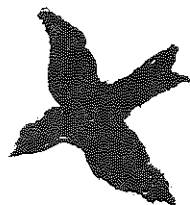
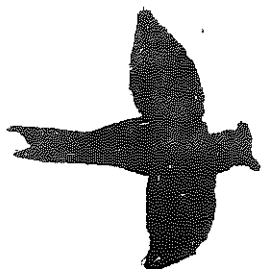
Fall arrived. Oh, how I loved beautiful Indian summer. The children were grown, and we had more time to relax and look at the lovely trees: the poplar with its bright yellow leaves, the gum with red and wine, and the maple with leaves of gold and bronze.

The nights became chilly and the mornings were cold. The air was brisk and made us all feel so good. Soon we would be going to the big swamp for the winter. This forest has a large creek with miles of pine and oak ridges and tyty bottoms, cypress and loblolly bay trees. There we would meet several other families.

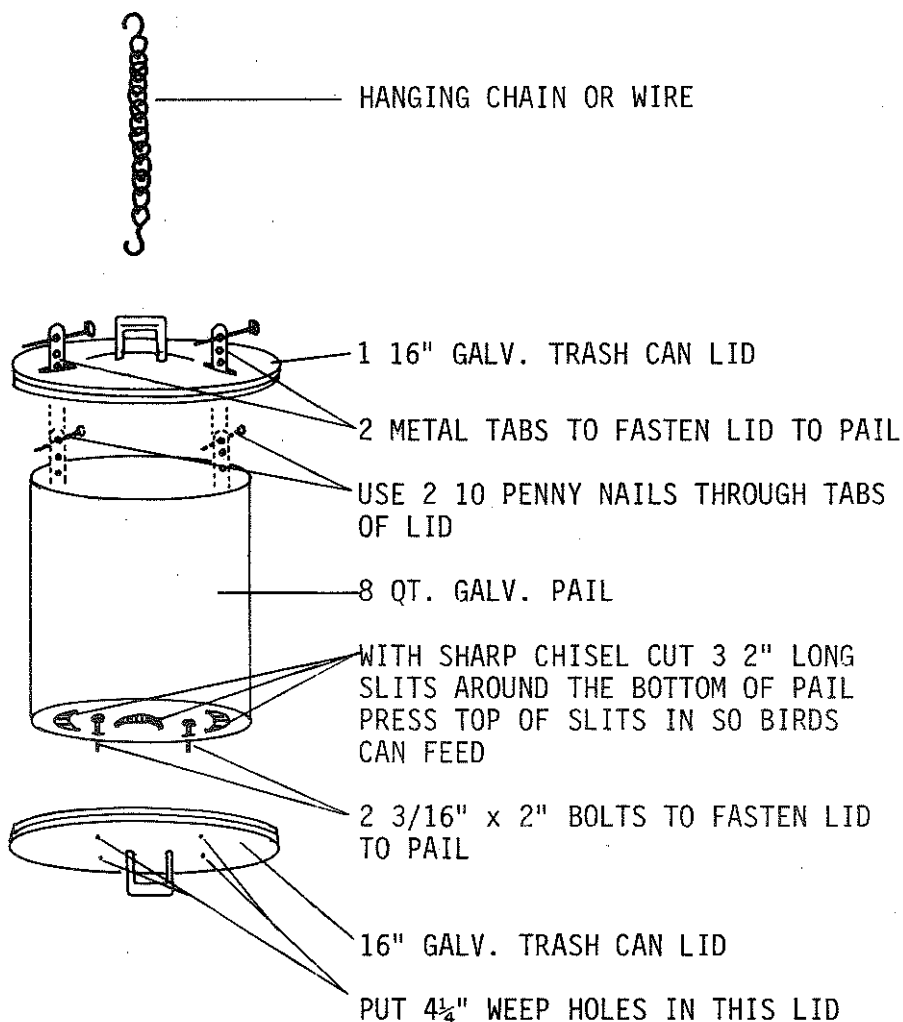
In fact, that is where I met Blossom. She was an only child. I was from a family of five, one boy and four girls. Blossom was a shy little chick with the most beautiful eyes-as black as chinquapins. I was a brash young man with some mighty big ideas. But we seemed to hit it off from the start. There are three other families that we know we will meet in the swamp. They are the Shady Acre Clan, the Cemetery Family, and the Big Church Folks. All of these areas are ideal for raising a family. The Shady Acre area is a mass of great old oak trees. The Cemetery location is in a real good place with all kinds of trees and shrubs and a beautiful little creek close by. The Big Church is by a park and play ground and some old homes with all kinds of flowers, shrubbery, large trees, and plenty of water close by, most ideal. In fact, Blossom and I started to settle there at one time, but there was a grouchey old couple already there so we decided to move on. We are happy where we are now.

The air was crisp and cold, the morning we started out for the big swamp. We stopped by Grandma Catchaser and Grandpa Workmore's house. We did not see them, but we did see a brisk.

smoke coming from the chimney and a good supply of crumbs was in the pan, so we knew that they were all right. We will return next spring. We will return every spring.



BIRD FEEDER



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to express thanks to Miss Thelma Hutchins for her Technical advice; to Mrs. Patricia Burch for her typing; and to Mrs. Sylvia P. Brown for her design and layout.