

"Are you ready?"

"Yes," they answered.

"One, two, three!"

And when she said "three," whrrr! away they all flew from the side of the plantation, as far as the sentry-box on the high road, and back again. And their mother told them they were learning to fly in preparation for a long journey they would have to take when the summer was over.

"We shall have to fly high up above the earth for days and nights, and we shall see below us great towns and rivers and the sea."

One afternoon towards the end of August, while the chicks were playing happily near their mother in the stubble, a carriage was heard approaching, and it stopped in the track by the edge of the plantation. They all raised their heads with eyes like black beads and listened. A voice could be heard calling: "Nero! to heel!"

The chicks did not understand, but their mother knew it was a man out shooting, and she stood petrified with fear. The plantation was their refuge, but exactly from that direction came the sportsman. After a moment's thought she ordered them to crouch down close to the earth, and on no consideration to move.

"I must rise, you must stay motionless, he who flies is lost. Do you understand?"

The chicks blinked their eyes to show they understood, and remained waiting in silence. They could hear the rustling of a dog moving through the stubble, and from time to time could be heard a man's voice: "Where are you? To heel, Nero!"

The rustling drew near--the dog saw them; he remained stationary, one paw in the air, his eyes fixed upon them.

"Do not move," whispered the quail to them, and she ran quickly farther away from them.

The dog followed slowly after her. The sportsman hurried up. His foot was so near to them that they could see an ant crawling up the leg of his boot. Oh, how their hearts beat! A few seconds later the quail rose, and flew low along the ground a few inches in front of the dog's muzzle. It pursued her, and the sportsman followed, shouting: "To heel! to heel!" He could not shoot for fear of hurting the dog; the quail pretended to be wounded so well that the dog was determined to catch her at all cost, but when she thought she was out of range of the gun she quickly flew for shelter towards the plantation.

During this time, the eldest fledgeling, instead of remaining motionless like his brothers, as their mother bade them, had taken to his wings; the sportsman heard the sound of his flight, turned and shot. He was some distance away. Only a single shot reached his wings. He did not fall, he managed to fly as far as the plantation, but there the movement of the wings caused the bone which had only been cracked at first to give way altogether, and the fledgeling fell with a broken wing.

The sportsman, knowing the plantation was very thick, and seeing it was a question of a young bird only, decided it was not worth while to look for it among the trees. The other little birds did not move from the spot where the quail had left them.

They listened in silence. From time to time they heard the report of a gun and the voice of the sportsman calling: "Bring it here!" After a time the carriage left the cart-track by the plantation and followed the sportsman; gradually the shots and the shouting became fainter and died away, and in the silence of the evening nothing could be heard but the song of the crickets; but when night had fallen and the moon had