Name: _____ Date: _____

A Chickadee on the Hand

Reading level 8 (4th grade) · 446 words

On a bright, cold winter morning, Tommy Tit the Chickadee flew out of the Green Forest and across the Old Orchard, singing as he came. His little voice was so cheerful that even Sammy Jay, who was seldom cheerful, forgot to scold.

Not long before, Tommy had made a boast. He had told Chatterer the Red Squirrel that Farmer Brown's boy was kind. He said he would just as soon eat out of the boy's hand as from any tree. Chatterer had said he did not believe it for a moment.

Now Tommy was on his way to prove it. Chatterer crept up behind the old stone wall to watch, keeping his head low and his ears up. Sammy Jay perched in the orchard, and Blacky the Crow stayed far off in a tall maple.

Tommy flew to a maple near the farmhouse and waited with his head tipped to one side. The door opened, and out came Farmer Brown's boy. He did not rush or reach. He stood still and whistled two soft notes. Tommy answered with the very same two notes.

The boy smiled. He held out his hand, and in it lay a cracked hickory nut. Every watcher held its breath, and the whole orchard seemed to wait. "He will not dare," whispered Chatterer. But Tommy was already in the air.

Down he fluttered, light as a leaf, and landed right on the boy's hand. He picked at a bit of nut meat and ate it up, and he did not seem a bit afraid. Behind the wall, Chatterer's mouth hung open.

Then Tommy hopped to the boy's shoulder and up to the top of his head. He sang a happy little song from up there, as if to say, "Did I not tell you?" The boy stood very still, and he smiled the whole time.

Chatterer rubbed his eyes. He had always thought that two-legged folk were something to run from. But Tommy sat on that boy's head, and nothing at all had happened to him. Chatterer felt something new then. It was not quite trust, but it was the start of it.

Sammy Jay screamed that it must be a trick. Blacky the Crow cawed that he would never be so foolish. Neither of them went any closer. But they stayed to watch, and that showed how much they both wondered about what they had seen.

Tommy flew back to the stone wall, proud and puffed. "I said I would," he told Chatterer, "and I did." Chatterer nodded slowly. He did not say a word. But for the first time, he looked at the farmhouse and did not want to run.

Questions

1. What was Tommy Tit?

A. A crow
B. A chickadee
C. A jay

2. What did the boy hold out?

A. A cracked nut
B. A string
C. A pail

3. Where did Tommy land last?

A. On the wall
B. On the boy's hand
C. On the boy's head

4. What does "boast" mean in this story?

A. A big meal
B. A kind of nut
C. Something said to show off

5. How did Chatterer change?

A. He started to wonder about trust
B. He ran away
C. He flew off

Words to know

boast: brag
scold: speak crossly
fluttered: flew lightly
trust: belief in someone

Answer key: A Chickadee on the Hand

1. B. A chickadee
2. A. A cracked nut
3. C. On the boy's head
4. C. Something said to show off
5. A. He started to wonder about trust