

Thornton Burgess Nature Reader

Three Mother West Wind Books

Thornton W. Burgess

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Thornton Burgess
Nature Reader

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OLD MOTHER WEST WIND

BY THORNTON W. BURGESS

CHAPTER I

MRS. REDWING'S SPECKLED EGG

Old Mother West Wind came down from the Purple Hills in the golden light of the early morning. Over her shoulders was slung a bag—a great big bag—and in the bag were all of Old Mother West Wind's children, the Merry Little Breezes.

Old Mother West Wind came down from the Purple Hills to the Green Meadows and as she walked she crooned a song:

"Ships upon the ocean wait;
I must hurry, hurry on!
Mills are idle if I'm late;
I must hurry, hurry on."

When she reached the Green Meadows Old Mother West Wind opened her bag, turned it upside down and shook it. Out tumbled all the Merry Little Breezes and began to spin round and round for very joy, for you see they were to lay in the Green Meadows all day long until Old Mother West Wind should come back at night and take them all to their home behind the Purple Hills.

First they raced over to see Johnny Chuck. They found Johnny Chuck sitting just outside his door eating his breakfast. One, for very mischief, snatched right out of Johnny Chuck's mouth the green leaf of corn he was

eating, and ran away with it. Another playfully pulled his whiskers, while a third rumpled up his hair.

Johnny Chuck pretended to be very cross indeed, but really he didn't mind a bit, for Johnny Chuck loved the Merry Little Breezes and played with them everyday.

And if they teased Johnny Chuck they were good to him, too. When they saw Farmer Brown coming across the Green Meadows with a gun one of them would dance over to Johnny Chuck and whisper to him that Farmer Brown was coming, and then Johnny Chuck would hide away, deep down in his snug little house under ground, and Farmer Brown would wonder and wonder why it was that he never, never could get near enough to shoot Johnny Chuck. But he never, never could.

When the Merry Little Breezes left Johnny Chuck they raced across the Green Meadows to the Smiling Pool to say good morning to Grandfather Frog who sat on a big lily pad watching for green flies for breakfast.

"Chug-arum," said Grandfather Frog, which was his way of saying good morning.

Just then along came a fat green fly and up jumped Grandfather Frog. When he sat down again on the lily pad the fat green fly was nowhere to be seen, but Grandfather Frog looked very well satisfied indeed as he contentedly rubbed his white waistcoat with one hand.

"What is the news, Grandfather Frog?" cried the Merry Little Breezes.

"Mrs. Redwing has a new speckled egg in her nest in the bulrushes," said Grandfather Frog.

"We must see it," cried the Merry Little Breezes, and away they all ran to the swamp where the bulrushes grow.

Now someone else had heard of Mrs. Redwing's dear little nest in the bulrushes, and he had started out bright and early that morning to try and find it, for he wanted to steal the little speckled eggs just because they were pretty. It was Tommy Brown, the farmer's boy.

When the Merry Little Breezes reached the swamp where the bulrushes grow they found poor Mrs. Redwing in great distress. She was afraid that Tommy Brown would find her dear little nest, for he was very, very near it, and his eyes were very, very sharp.

"Oh," cried the Merry Little Breezes, "we must help Mrs. Redwing save her pretty speckled eggs from bad Tommy Brown!"

So one of the Merry Little Breezes whisked Tommy Brown's old straw hat off his head over into the Green Meadows. Of course Tommy ran after it. Just as he stooped to pick it up another little Breeze ran away with it. Then they took turns, first one little Breeze, then another little Breeze running away with the old straw hat just as Tommy Brown would almost get his hands on it. Down past the Smiling Pool and across the Laughing Brook they raced and chased the old straw hat, Tommy Brown running after it, very cross, very red in the face, and breathing very hard. Way across the Green Meadows they ran to the edge of the wood, where they hung the old straw hat in the middle of a thorn tree. By the time Tommy Brown had it once more on his head he had forgotten all about Mrs. Redwing and her dear little nest. Besides, he heard the breakfast horn blowing just then, so off he started for home up the Lone Little Path through the wood.

And all the Merry Little Breezes danced away across the Green Meadows to the swamp where the bulrushes grow

to see the new speckled egg in the dear little nest where Mrs. Redwing was singing for joy. And while she sang the Merry Little Breezes danced among the bulrushes, for they knew, and Mrs. Redwing knew, that some day out of that pretty new speckled egg would come a wee baby Redwing.

CHAPTER II

WHY GRANDFATHER FROG HAS NO TAIL

Old Mother West Wind had gone to her day's work, leaving all the Merry Little Breezes to play in the Green Meadows. They had played tag and run races with the Bees and played hide and seek with the Sun Beams, and now they had gathered around the Smiling Pool where on a green lily pad sat Grandfather Frog.

Grandfather Frog was old, very old, indeed, and very, very wise. He wore a green coat and his voice was very deep. When Grandfather Frog spoke everybody listened very respectfully. Even Billy Mink treated Grandfather Frog with respect, for Billy Mink's father and his father's father could not remember when Grandfather Frog had not sat on the lily pad watching for green flies.

Down in the Smiling Pool were some of Grandfather Frog's great-great-great-great-great grand-children. You wouldn't have known that they were his grandchildren unless some one told you. They didn't look the least bit like Grandfather Frog. They were round and fat and had long tails and perhaps this is why they were called Pollywogs.

"Oh Grandfather Frog, tell us why you don't have a tail as you did when you were young," begged one of the Merry Little Breezes.

Grandfather Frog snapped up a foolish green fly and settled himself on his big lily pad, while all the Merry Little Breezes gathered round to listen.

"Once on a time," began Grandfather Frog, "the Frogs ruled the world, which was mostly water. There was very little dry land—oh, very little indeed! There were no boys to throw stones and no hungry Mink to gobble up foolish Frog-babies who were taking a sun bath!"

Billy Mink, who had joined the Merry Little Breezes and was listening, squirmed uneasily and looked away guiltily.

"In those days all the Frogs had tails, long handsome tails of which they were very, very proud indeed," continued Grandfather Frog. "The King of all the Frogs was twice as big as any other Frog, and his tail was three times as long. He was very proud, oh, very proud indeed of his long tail. He used to sit and admire it until he thought that there never had been and never could be another such tail. He used to wave it back and forth in the water, and every time he waved it all the other Frogs would cry 'Ah!' and 'Oh!' Every day the King grew more vain. He did nothing at all but eat and sleep and admire his tail.

"Now all the other Frogs did just as the King did, so pretty soon none of the Frogs were doing anything but sitting about eating, sleeping and admiring their own tails and the King's.

"Now you all know that people who do nothing worth while in this world are of no use and there is little room for them. So when Mother Nature saw how useless had become the Frog tribe she called the King Frog before her and she said:

"'Because you can think of nothing but your beautiful tail it shall be taken away from you. Because you do nothing but eat and sleep your mouth shall become wide like a door, and your eyes shall start forth from your head. You shall become bow-legged and ugly to look at, and all the world shall laugh at you.'

"The King Frog looked at his beautiful tail and already it seemed to have grown shorter. He looked again and it was shorter still. Every time he looked his tail had grown shorter and smaller. By and by when he looked there was nothing left but a little stub which he couldn't even wriggle. Then even that disappeared, his eyes popped out of his head and his mouth grew bigger and bigger."

Old Grandfather Frog stopped and looked sadly at a foolish green fly coming his way. "Chug-arum," said Grandfather Frog, opening his mouth very wide and hopping up in the air. When he sat down again on his big lily pad the green fly was nowhere to be seen. Grandfather Frog smacked his lips and continued:

"And from that day to this every Frog has started life with a big tail, and as he has grown bigger and bigger his tail has grown smaller and smaller, until finally it disappears, and then he remembers how foolish and useless it is to be vain of what nature has given us. And that is how I came to lose my tail," finished Grandfather Frog.

"Thank you," shouted all the Merry Little Breezes. "We won't forget."

Then they ran a race to see who could reach Johnny Chuck's home first and tell him that Farmer Brown was coming down on the Green Meadows with a gun.

CHAPTER III

HOW REDDY FOX WAS SURPRISED

Johnny Chuck and Reddy Fox lived very near together on the edge of the Green Meadows. Johnny Chuck was fat and roly-poly. Reddy Fox was slim and wore a bright red coat. Reddy Fox used to like to frighten Johnny Chuck by suddenly popping out from behind a tree and making believe that he was going to eat Johnny Chuck all up.

One bright summer day Johnny Chuck was out looking for a good breakfast of nice tender clover. He had wandered quite a long way from his snug little house in the long meadow grass, although his mother had told him never to go out of sight of the door. But Johnny was like some little boys I know, and forgot all he had been told.

He walked and walked and walked. Every few minutes Johnny Chuck saw something farther on that looked like a patch of nice fresh clover. And every time when he reached it Johnny Chuck found that he had made a mistake. So Johnny Chuck walked and walked and walked.

Old Mother West Wind, coming across the Green Meadows, saw Johnny Chuck and asked him where he was going. Johnny Chuck pretended not to hear and just walked faster.

One of the Merry Little Breezes danced along in front of him.

"Look out, Johnny Chuck, you will get lost," cried the Merry Little Breeze then pulled Johnny's whiskers and ran away.

Higher and higher up in the sky climbed round, red Mr. Sun. Every time Johnny Chuck looked up at him Mr. Sun winked.

"So long as I can see great round, red Mr. Sun and he winks at me I can't be lost," thought Johnny Chuck, and trotted on looking for clover.

By and by Johnny Chuck really did find some clover—just the sweetest clover that grew in the Green Meadows. Johnny Chuck ate and ate and ate and then what do you think he did? Why, he curled right up in the nice sweet clover and went fast asleep.

Great round, red Mr. Sun kept climbing higher and higher up in the sky, then by and by he began to go down on the other side, and long shadows began to creep out across the Green Meadows. Johnny Chuck didn't know anything about them: he was fast asleep.

By and by one of the Merry Little Breezes found Johnny Chuck all curled up in a funny round ball.

"Wake up Johnny Chuck! Wake up!" shouted the Merry Little Breeze.

Johnny Chuck opened his eyes. Then he sat up and rubbed them. For just a few, few minutes he couldn't remember where he was at all.

By and by he sat up very straight to look over the grass and see where he was. But he was so far from home that he didn't see a single thing that looked at all like the things he was used to. The trees were all different. The bushes were all different. Everything was different. Johnny Chuck was lost.

Now, when Johnny sat up, Reddy Fox happened to be looking over the Green Meadows and he saw Johnny's head where it popped above the grass.

"Aha!" said Reddy Fox, "I'll scare Johnny Chuck so he'll wish he'd never put his nose out of his house."

Then Reddy dropped down behind the long grass and crept softly, oh, ever so softly, through the paths of his own, until he was right behind Johnny Chuck. Johnny Chuck had been so intent looking for home that he didn't see anything else.

Reddy Fox stole right up behind Johnny and pulled Johnny's little short tail hard. How it did frighten Johnny Chuck! He jumped right straight up in the air and when he came down he was the maddest little woodchuck that ever lived in the Green Meadows.

Reddy Fox had thought that Johnny would run, and then Reddy meant to run after him and pull his tail and tease him all the way home. Now, Reddy Fox got as big a surprise as Johnny had had when Reddy pulled his tail. Johnny didn't stop to think that Reddy Fox was twice as big as he, but with his eyes snapping, and chattering as only a little Chuck can chatter, with every little hair on his little body standing right up on end, so that he seemed twice as big as he really was, he started for Reddy Fox.

It surprised Reddy Fox so that he didn't know what to do, and he simply ran. Johnny Chuck ran after him, nipping Reddy's heels every minute or two. Peter Rabbit just happened to be down that way. He was sitting up very straight looking to see what mischief he could get into when he caught sight of Reddy Fox running as hard as ever he could. "It must be that Bowser, the hound, is after

Reddy Fox," said Peter Rabbit to himself. "I must watch out that he doesn't find me."

Just then he caught sight of Johnny Chuck with every little hair standing up on end and running after Reddy Fox as fast as his short legs could go.

"Ho! ho! ho!" shouted Peter Rabbit. "Reddy Fox afraid of Johnny Chuck! Ho! ho! Ho!"

Then Peter Rabbit scampered away to find Jimmy Skunk and Bobby Coon and Happy Jack Squirrel to tell them all about how Reddy Fox had run away from Johnny Chuck, for you see they were all a little afraid of Reddy Fox.

Straight home ran Reddy Fox as fast as he could go, and going home he passed the house of Johnny Chuck. Now Johnny couldn't run so fast as Reddy Fox and he was puffing and blowing as only a fat little woodchuck can puff and blow when he has to run hard. Moreover, he had lost his ill temper now and he thought it was the best joke ever to think that he had actually frightened Reddy Fox. When he came to his own house he stopped and sat on his hind legs once more. Then he shrilled out after Reddy Fox: "Reddy Fox is a 'fraid cat, 'fraid-cat! Reddy Fox is a 'fraid-cat!"

And all the Merry Little Breezes of Old Mother West Wind, who were playing on the Green Meadows shouted: "Reddy Fox is a 'fraid-cat, 'fraid-cat!"

And this is the way that Reddy Fox was surprised and that Johnny Chuck found his way home.

CHAPTER IV

WHY JIMMY SKUNK WEARS STRIPES

Jimmy Skunk, as everybody knows, wears a striped suit, a suit of black and white. There was a time, long, long ago, when all the Skunk family wore black. Very handsome their coats were, too, a beautiful, glossy black. They were very, very proud of them and took the greatest care of them, brushing them carefully ever so many times a day.

There was a Jimmy Skunk then, just as there is now, and he was head of all the Skunk family. Now this Jimmy Skunk was very proud and thought himself very much of a gentleman. He was very independent and cared for no one. Like a great many other independent people, he did not always consider the rights of others. Indeed, it was hinted in the wood and on the Green Meadows that not all of Jimmy Skunk's doings would bear the light of day. It was openly said that he was altogether too fond of prowling about at night, but no one could prove that he was responsible for mischief done in the night, for no one saw him. You see his coat was so black that in the darkness of the night it was not visible at all.

Now about this time of which I am telling you Mrs. Ruffed Grouse made a nest at the foot of the Great Pine and in it she laid fifteen beautiful buff eggs. Mrs. Grouse was very happy, very happy indeed, and all the little meadow folks who knew of her happiness were happy too, for they all loved shy, demure, little Mrs. Grouse. Every

morning when Peter Rabbit trotted down the Lone Little Path through the wood past the Great Pine he would stop for a few minutes to chat with Mrs. Grouse. Happy Jack Squirrel would bring her the news every afternoon. The Merry Little Breezes of Old Mother West Wind would run up a dozen times a day to see how she was getting along.

One morning Peter Rabbit, coming down the Lone Little Path for his usual morning call, found a terrible state of affairs. Poor little Mrs. Grouse was heart-broken. All about the foot of the Great Pine lay the empty shells of her beautiful eggs. They had been broken and scattered this way and that.

"How did it happen?" asked Peter Rabbit.

"I don't know," sobbed poor little Mrs. Grouse. "In the night when I was fast asleep something pounced upon me. I managed to get away and fly up in the top of the Great Pine. In the morning I found all my eggs broken, just as you see them here."

Peter Rabbit looked the ground over very carefully. He hunted around behind the Great Pine, he looked under the bushes, he studied the ground with a very wise air. Then he hopped off down the Lone Little Path to the Green Meadows. He stopped at the house of Johnny Chuck.

"What makes your eyes so big and round?" asked Johnny Chuck.

Peter Rabbit came very close so as to whisper in Johnny Chuck's ear, and told him all that he had seen. Together they went to Jimmy Skunk's house. Jimmy Skunk was in bed. He was very sleepy and very cross when he came to the door. Peter Rabbit told him what he had seen.

"Too bad! Too bad!" said Jimmy Skunk, and yawned sleepily.

"Won't you join us in trying to find out who did it?" asked Johnny Chuck.

Jimmy Skunk said he would be delighted to come but that he had some other business that morning and that he would join them in the afternoon. Peter Rabbit and Johnny Chuck went on. Pretty soon they met the Merry Little Breezes and told them the dreadful story.

"What shall we do?" asked Johnny Chuck.

"We'll hurry over and tell Old Dame Nature," cried the Merry Little Breezes, "and ask her what to do."

So away flew the Merry Little Breezes to Old Dame Nature and told her all the dreadful story. Old Dame Nature listened very attentively. Then she sent the Merry Little Breezes to all the little meadow folks to tell every one to be at the Great Pine that afternoon. Now whatever Old Dame Nature commanded all the meadow folks were obliged to do. They did not dare to disobey her. Promptly at four o'clock that afternoon all the meadow folks were gathered around the foot of the Great Pine. Broken-hearted little Mrs. Ruffed Grouse sat beside her empty nest, with all the broken shells about her.

Reddy Fox, Peter Rabbit, Johnny Chuck, Billy Mink, Little Joe Otter, Jerry Muskrat, Hooty the Owl, Bobby Coon, Sammy Jay, Blacky the Crow, Grandfather Frog, Mr. Toad, Spotty the Turtle, the Merry Little Breezes, all were there. Last of all came Jimmy Skunk. Very handsome he looked in his shining black coat and very sorry he appeared that such a dreadful thing should have happened. He told Mrs. Grouse how badly he felt, and he

loudly demanded that the culprit should be found out and severely punished.

Old Dame Nature has the most smiling face in the world, but this time it was very, very grave indeed. First she asked little Mrs. Grouse to tell her story all over again that all might hear. Then each in turn was asked to tell where he had been the night before. Johnny Chuck, Happy Jack Squirrel, Striped Chipmunk, Sammy Jay and Blacky the Crow had gone to bed when Mr. Sun went down behind the Purple Hills. Jerry Muskrat, Billy Mink, Little Joe Otter, Grandfather Frog and Spotty the Turtle had not left the Smiling Pool. Bobby Coon had been down in Farmer Brown's cornfield. Hooty the Owl had been hunting in the lower end of the Green Meadows. Peter Rabbit had been down in the berry patch. Mr. Toad had been under the piece of bark which he called a house. Old Dame Nature called on Jimmy Skunk last of all. Jimmy protested that he had been very, very tired and had gone to bed very early indeed and had slept the whole night through.

Then Old Dame Nature asked Peter Rabbit what he had found among the egg shells that morning.

Peter Rabbit hopped out and laid three long black hairs before Old Dame Nature. "These," said Peter Rabbit "are what I found among the egg shells."

Then Old Dame Nature called Johnny Chuck. "Tell us, Johnny Chuck," said she, "what you saw when you called at Jimmy Skunk's house this morning."

"I saw Jimmy Skunk," said Johnny Chuck, "and Jimmy seemed very, very sleepy. It seemed to me that his whiskers were yellow."

"That will do," said Old Dame Nature, and then she called Old Mother West Wind.

"What time did you come down on the Green Meadows this morning?"

"Just at the break of day," said Old Mother West Wind, "as Mr. Sun was coming up from behind the Purple Hills."

"And whom did you see so early in the morning?" asked Old Dame Nature.

"I saw Bobby Coon going home from old Farmer Brown's cornfield," said Old Mother West Wind. "I saw Hooty the Owl coming back from the lower end of the Green Meadows. I saw Peter Rabbit down in the berry patch. Last of all I saw something like a black shadow coming down the Lone Little Path toward the house of Jimmy Skunk."

Every one was looking very hard at Jimmy Skunk. Jimmy began to look very unhappy and very uneasy.

"Who wears a black coat?" asked Dame Nature.

"Jimmy Skunk!" shouted all the little meadow folks.

"What MIGHT make whiskers yellow?" asked Old Dame Nature.

No one seemed to know at first. Then Peter Rabbit spoke up. "It MIGHT be the yolk of an egg," said Peter Rabbit.

"Who are likely to be sleepy on a bright sunny morning?" asked Old Dame Nature.

"People who have been out all night," said Johnny Chuck, who himself always goes to bed with the sun.

"Jimmy Skunk," said Old Dame Nature, and her voice was very stern, very stern indeed, and her face was very grave. "Jimmy Skunk, I accuse you of having broken and eaten the eggs of Mrs. Grouse. What have you to say for yourself?"

Jimmy Skunk hung his head. He hadn't a word to say. He just wanted to sneak away by himself.

"Jimmy Skunk," said Old Dame Nature, "because your handsome black coat of which you are so proud has made it possible for you to move about in the night without being seen, and because we can no longer trust you upon your honor, henceforth you and your descendants shall wear a striped coat, which is the sign that you cannot be trusted. Your coat hereafter shall be black and white, that when you move about in the night you will always be visible."

And this is why that to this day Jimmy Skunk wears a striped suit of black and white.

CHAPTER V

THE WILFUL LITTLE BREEZE

Old Mother West Wind was tired—tired and just a wee bit cross—cross because she was tired. She had had a very busy day. Ever since early morning she had been puffing out the white sales of the ships on the big ocean so that they could go faster; she had kept all the big and little wind mills whirling and whirling to pump water for thirsty folks and grind corn for hungry folks; she had blown away all the smoke from tall chimneys and engines and steamboats. Yes, indeed, Old Mother West Wind had been very, very busy.

Now she was coming across the Green Meadows on her way to her home behind the Purple Hills, and as she came she opened the big bag she carried and called to her children, the Merry Little Breezes, who had been playing hard on the Green Meadows all the long day. One by one they crept into the big bag, for they were tired, too, and ready to go to their home behind the Purple Hills.

Pretty soon all were in the bag but one, a willful little Breeze, who was not quite ready to go home; he wanted to play just a little longer. He danced ahead of Old Mother West Wind. He kissed the sleepy daisies. He shook the nodding buttercups. He set all the little poplar leaves a dancing, too, and he wouldn't come into the big bag. So Old Mother West Wind closed the big bag and slung it

over her shoulder. Then she started on towards her home behind the Purple Hills.

When she had gone, the willful little Breeze left behind suddenly felt very lonely—very lonely indeed! The sleepy daisies didn't want to play. The nodding buttercups were cross. Great round bright Mr. Sun, who had been shining and shining all day long, went to bed and put on his night cap of golden clouds. Black shadows came creeping, creeping out into the Green Meadows.

The willful little Breeze began to wish that he was safe in Old Mother West Wind's big bag with all the other Merry Little Breezes.

So he started across the Green Meadows to find the Purple Hills. But all the hills were black now and he could not tell which he should look behind to find his home with Old Mother West Wind and the Merry Little Breezes. How he did wish that he had minded Old Mother West Wind.

By and by he curled up under a bayberry bush and tried to go to sleep, but he was lonely, oh, so lonely! And he couldn't go to sleep. Old Mother Moon came up and flooded all the Green Meadows with light, but it wasn't like the bright light of jolly round Mr. Sun, for it was cold and white and it made many black shadows.

Pretty soon the willful little Breeze heard Hooty the Owl out hunting for a meadow mouse for his dinner. Then down the Lone Little Path which ran close to the bayberry bush trotted Reddy Fox. He was trotting very softly and every minute or so he turned his head and looked behind him to see if he was followed. It was plain to see that Reddy Fox was bent on mischief.

When he reached the bayberry bush Reddy Fox sat down and barked twice. Hooty the Owl answered him at

once and flew over to join him. They didn't see the willful little Breeze curled up under the bayberry bush, so intent were these two rogues in plotting mischief. They were planning to steal down across the Green Meadows to the edge of the Brown Pasture where Mr. Bob White and pretty Mrs. Bob White and a dozen little Bob Whites had their home.

"When they run along the ground I'll catch 'em, and when they fly up in the air you'll catch 'em, and we'll gobble 'em all up," said Reddy Fox to Hooty the Owl. Then he licked his chops and Hooty the Owl snapped his bill, just as if they were tasting tender little Bob Whites that very minute. It made the willful little Breeze shiver to see them. Pretty soon they started on towards the Brown Pasture.

When they were out of sight the willful little Breeze jumped up and shook himself. Then away he sped across the Green Meadows to the Brown Pasture. And because he could go faster and because he went a shorter way he got there first. He had to hunt and hunt to find Mrs. and Mr. Bob White and all the little Bob Whites, but finally he did find them, all with their heads tucked under their wings fast asleep.

The willful little Breeze shook Mr. Bob White very gently. In an instant he was wide awake.

"Sh-h-h," said the willful little Breeze. "Reddy Fox and Hooty the Owl are coming to the Brown Pasture to gobble up you and Mrs. Bob White and all the little Bob Whites."

"Thank you, little Breeze," said Mr. Bob White, "I think I'll move my family."

Then he woke Mrs. Bob White and all the little Bob Whites. With Mr. Bob White in the lead away they all flew

to the far side of the Brown Pasture where they were soon safely hidden under a juniper tree.

The willful little Breeze saw them safely there, and when they were nicely hidden hurried back to the place where the Bob Whites had been sleeping. Reddy Fox was stealing up through the grass very, very softly. Hooty the Owl was flying as silently as a shadow. When Reddy Fox thought he was near enough he drew himself together, made a quick spring and landed right in Mr. Bob White's empty bed. Reddy Fox and Hooty the Owl looked so surprised and foolish when they found the Bob Whites were not there that the willful little Breeze nearly laughed out loud.

Then Reddy Fox and Hooty the Owl hunted here and hunted there, all over the Brown Pasture, but they couldn't find the Bob Whites.

And the willful little Breeze went back to the juniper tree and curled himself beside Mr. Bob White to sleep, for he was lonely no longer.

CHAPTER VI

REDDY FOX GOES FISHING

One morning when Mr. Sun was very, very bright and it was very, very warm, down on the Green Meadows Reddy Fox came hopping and skipping down the Lone Little Path that leads to the Laughing Brook. Hoppity, skip, skippity hop! Reddy felt very much pleased with himself that sunny morning. Pretty soon he saw Johnny Chuck sitting up very straight close by the little house where he lives.

"Johnny Chuck, Chuck, Chuck! Johnny Chuck, Chuck, Chuck! Johnny Woodchuck!" called Reddy fox.

Johnny Chuck pretended not to hear. His mother had told him not to play with Reddy Fox, for Reddy Fox was a bad boy.

"Johnny Chuck, Chuck, Chuck! Johnny Woodchuck!" called Reddy again.

This time Johnny turned and looked. He could see Reddy Fox turning somersaults and chasing his tail and rolling over and over in the little path.

"Come on!" said Reddy Fox. "Let's go fishing!"

"Can't," said Johnny Chuck, because you know, his mother had told him not to play with Reddy Fox.

"I'll show you how to catch a fish," said Reddy Fox, and tried to jump over his own shadow.

"Can't," said good little Johnny Chuck again, and turned away so that he couldn't see Reddy Fox chasing Butterflies and playing catch with Field Mice children.

So Reddy Fox went down to the Laughing Brook all alone. The Brook was laughing and singing on its way to join the Big River. The sky was blue and the sun was bright. Reddy Fox jumped on the Big Rock in the middle of the Laughing Brook and peeped over the other side. What do you think he saw? Why, right down below in a Dear Little Pool were Mr. And Mrs. Trout and all the little Trouts.

Reddy Fox wanted some of those little Trouts to take home for his dinner, but he didn't know how to catch them. He lay flat down on the Big Rock and reached way down into the Dear Little Pool, but all the little Trouts laughed at Reddy Fox and not one came within reach. Then Mr. Trout swam up so quickly that Reddy Fox didn't see him coming and bit Reddy's little black paw hard.

"Ouch!" cried Reddy Fox, pulling his little black paw out of the water. And all the little Trouts laughed at Reddy Fox.

Just then along came Billy Mink.

"Hello, Reddy Fox!" said Billy Mink. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm trying to catch a fish," said Reddy Fox.

"Pooh! That's easy!" said Billy Mink. "I'll show you how."

So Billy Mink lay down on the Big Rock side of Reddy Fox and peeped over into the Dear Little Pool where all the little Trouts were laughing at Reddy Fox and having such a good time. But Billy Mink took care, such very great care, that Mr. Trout and Mrs. Trout should not see him peeping over into the Dear Little Pool.

When Billy Mink saw all those little Trouts playing in the Dear Little Pool he laughed. "You count three, Reddy Fox," said he, "and I'll show you how to catch a fish."

"One!" said Reddy Fox, "Two! Three!"

Splash! Billy Mink had dived head first into the Dear Little Pool. He spattered water way up onto Reddy Fox, and he frightened old Mr. Frog so that he fell over backwards off the lily pad where he was taking a morning nap right into the water. In a minute Billy Mink climbed out on the other side of the Dear Little Pool and sure enough, he had caught one of the little Trouts.

"Give it to me," cried Reddy Fox.

"Catch one yourself," said Billy Mink. "Old Grandpa Mink wants a fish for his dinner, so I am going to take this home. You're afraid, Reddy Fox! 'Fraid-cat! 'Fraid-cat!"

Billy Mink shook the water off of his little brown coat, picked up the little Trout and ran off home.

Reddy Fox lay down again on the Big Rock and peeped into the Dear Little Pool. Not a single Trout could he see. They were all hiding safely with Mr. and Mrs. Trout. Reddy Fox watched and watched. The sun was warm, the Laughing Brook was singing a lullaby and—what do you think? Why, Reddy Fox went fast asleep on the edge of the great Big Rock.

By and by Reddy Fox began to dream. He dreamed that he had a nice little brown coat that was waterproof, just like the little brown coat that Billy Mink wore. Yes, and he dreamed that he had learned to swim and to catch fish just as Billy Mink did. He dreamed that the Dear Little Pool was full of little Trouts and that he was just going to catch one when—splash! Reddy Fox had rolled right off of the Big Rock into the Dear Little Pool.

The water went into the eyes of Reddy Fox, and it went up his nose and he swallowed so much that he felt as if he never, never would want another drink of water. And his beautiful red coat, which old Mother Fox had told him to be very, very careful of because he couldn't have another for a whole year, was oh so wet! And his pants were wet and his beautiful bushy tail, of which he was so proud, was so full of water that he couldn't hold it up, but had to drag it up the bank after him as he crawled out of the Dear Little Pool.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed Mr. Kingfisher, sitting on a tree.

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" laughed old Mr. Frog, who had climbed back on his lily pad.

"He! He! He!" laughed all the little Trouts and Mr. Trout and Mrs. Trout, swimming round and round in the Dear Little Pool.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Ho! Ho! Ho! He! He! He!" laughed Billy Mink, who had come back to the Big Rock just in time to see Reddy Fox tumble in.

Reddy Fox didn't say a word, he was so ashamed. He just crept up the Lone Little Path to his home, dragging his tail, all wet and muddy, behind him, and dripping water all the way.

Johnny Chuck was still sitting by his door as his mother had told him to. Reddy Fox tried to go past without being seen, but Johnny Chuck's bright little eyes saw him.

"Where are your fish, Reddy Fox?" called Johnny Chuck.

"Why don't you turn somersaults, and jump over your shadow and chase Butterflies and play with the little Field Mice, Reddy Fox?" called Johnny Chuck.

But Reddy Fox just walked faster. When he got almost home he saw old Mother Fox sitting in the doorway with a great big switch across her lap, for Mother Fox had told Reddy Fox not to go near the Laughing Brook.

And this is all I am going to tell you about how Reddy Fox went fishing.

CHAPTER VII

JIMMY SKUNK LOOKS FOR BEETLES

Jimmy Skunk opened his eyes very early one morning and peeped out of his snug little house on the hill. Big, round Mr. Sun, with a very red, smiling face, had just begun to climb up into the sky. Old Mother West Wind was just starting down to the Green Meadows with her big bag over her shoulder. In that bag Jimmy Skunk knew she carried all her children, the Merry Little Breezes, whom she was taking down to the Green Meadows to play and frolic all day.

"Good morning, Mother West Wind," said Jimmy Skunk, politely. "Did you see any beetles as you came down the hill?"

Old Mother West Wind said, no, she hadn't seen any beetles as she came down the hill.

"Thank you," said Jimmy Skunk politely. "I guess I'll have to go look myself, for I'm very, very hungry."

So Jimmy Skunk brushed his handsome black and white coat, and washed his face and hands, and started out to try to find some beetles for his breakfast. First he went down to the Green Meadows and stopped at Johnny Chuck's house. But Johnny Chuck was still in bed and fast asleep. Then Jimmy Skunk went over to see if Reddy Fox would go with him to help find some beetles for his breakfast. But Reddy Fox had been out very, very late the night before and was still in bed fast asleep, too.

So Jimmy Skunk set out all alone along the Crooked Little Path up the hill to find some beetles for his breakfast. He walked very slowly, for Jimmy Skunk never hurries. He stopped and peeped under every old log to see if there were any beetles. By and by he came to a big piece of bark beside the Crooked Little Path. Jimmy Skunk took hold of the piece of bark with his two little black paws and pulled and pulled. All of a sudden, the big piece of bark turned over so quickly that Jimmy Skunk fell flat on his back.

When Jimmy Skunk had rolled over onto his feet again, there sat old Mr. Toad right in the path, and old Mr. Toad was very, very cross indeed. He swelled and he puffed and he puffed and he swelled, till he was twice as big as Jimmy Skunk had ever seen him before.

"Good morning, Mr. Toad," said Jimmy Skunk. "Have you seen any beetles?"

But Mr. Toad blinked his great round goggly eyes and he said: "What do you mean, Jimmy Skunk, by pulling the roof off my house?"

"Is that the roof of your house?" asked Jimmy Skunk politely. "I won't do it again."

Then Jimmy Skunk stepped right over old Mr. Toad, and went on up the Crooked Little Path to look for some beetles.

By and by he came to an old stump of a tree which was hollow and had the nicest little round hole in one side. Jimmy Skunk took hold of one edge with his two little black paws and pulled and pulled. All of a sudden the whole side of the old stump tore open and Jimmy Skunk fell flat on his back.

When Jimmy Skunk had rolled over onto his feet again there was Striped Chipmunk hopping up and down right in the middle of the path, he was so angry.

"Good morning, Striped Chipmunk," said Jimmy Skunk. "Have you seen any beetles?"

But Striped Chipmunk hopped faster than ever and he said: "What do you mean, Jimmy Skunk, by pulling the side off my house?"

"Is that the side of your house?" asked Jimmy Skunk, politely. "I won't do it again."

Then Jimmy Skunk stepped right over Striped Chipmunk, and went on up the Crooked Little Path to look for some beetles.

Pretty soon he met Peter Rabbit hopping along down the Crooked Little Path. "Good morning, Jimmy Skunk, where are you going so early in the morning?" said Peter Rabbit.

"Good morning, Peter Rabbit. Have you seen any beetles?" asked Jimmy Skunk, politely.

"No, I haven't seen any beetles, but I'll help you find some," said Peter Rabbit. So he turned about and hopped ahead of Jimmy Skunk up the Crooked Little Path.

Now because Peter Rabbit's legs are long and he is always in a hurry, he got to the top of the hill first. When Jimmy Skunk reached the end of the Crooked Little Path on the top of the hill he found Peter Rabbit sitting up very straight and looking and looking very hard at a great flat stone.

"What are you looking at, Peter Rabbit?" asked Jimmy Skunk.

"Sh-h-h!" said Peter Rabbit, "I think there are some beetles under that great flat stone where that little black

string is sticking out. Now when I count three you grab that string and pull hard perhaps you'll find a beetle at the other end."

So Jimmy Skunk got ready and Peter Rabbit began to count.

"One!" said Peter. "Two!" said Peter. "Three!"

Jimmy Skunk grabbed the black string and pulled as hard as ever he could and out came—Mr. Black Snake! The string Jimmy Skunk had pulled was Mr. Black Snake's tail, and Mr. Black Snake was very, very angry indeed.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed Peter Rabbit.

"What do you mean, Jimmy Skunk," said Mr. Black Snake, "by pulling my tail?"

"Was that your tail?" said Jimmy Skunk, politely. "I won't do it again. Have you seen any beetles?"

But Mr. Black Snake hadn't seen any beetles, and he was so cross that Jimmy Skunk went on over the hill to look for some beetles.

Peter Rabbit was still laughing and laughing and laughing. And the more he laughed the angrier grew Mr. Black Snake, till finally he started after Peter Rabbit to teach him a lesson.

Then Peter Rabbit stopped laughing, for Mr. Black Snake can run very fast. Away went Peter Rabbit down the Crooked Little Path as fast as he could go, and away went Mr. Black Snake after him.

But Jimmy Skunk didn't even look once to see if Mr. Black Snake had caught Peter Rabbit to teach him a lesson, for Jimmy Skunk had found some beetles and was eating his breakfast.

CHAPTER VIII

BILLY MINK'S SWIMMING PARTY

Billy Mink was coming down the bank of the Laughing Brook. Billy Mink was feeling very good indeed. He had had a good breakfast, the sun was warm, little white cloud ships were sailing across the blue sky and their shadows were sailing across the Green Meadows, the birds were singing and the bees were humming. Billy Mink felt like singing too, but Billy Mink's voice was not meant for singing.

By and by Billy Mink came to the Smiling Pool. Here the Laughing Brook stopped and rested on its way to join the Big River. It stopped its noisy laughing and singing and just lay smiling and smiling in the warm sunshine. The little flowers on the bank leaned over and nodded to it. The beech tree, which was very old, sometimes dropped a leaf into it. The cattails kept their feet cool in the edge of it.

Billy Mink jumped out on the Big Rock and looked down into the Smiling Pool. Over on a green lily pad he saw old Grandfather Frog.

"Hello, Grandfather Frog," said Billy Mink.

"Hello, Billy Mink," said Grandfather Frog. "What mischief are you up to this fine sunny morning?"

Just then Billy Mink saw a little brown head swimming along one edge of the Smiling Pool.

"Hello, Jerry Muskrat!" shouted Billy Mink.

"Hello your own self, Billy Mink," shouted Jerry Muskrat, "Come in and have a swim; the water's fine!"

"Good," said Billy Mink. "We'll have a swimming party."

So Billy Mink called all the Merry Little Breezes of Old Mother West Wind, who were playing with the flowers on the bank, and sent them to find Little Joe Otter and invite him to come to the swimming party. Pretty soon back came the Little Breezes and with them came Little Joe Otter.

"Hello, Billy Mink," said Little Joe Otter. "Here I am!"

"Hello, Little Joe Otter," said Billy Mink. "Come up here on the Big Rock and see who can dive the deepest into the Smiling Pool."

So Little Joe Otter and Jerry Muskrat climbed up on the Big Rock side of Billy Mink and they all stood side by side in their little brown bathing suits looking down into the Smiling Pool.

"Now when I count three we'll all dive into the Smiling Pool together and see who can dive the deepest. One!" said Billy Mink. "Two!" said Billy Mink. "Three!" said Billy Mink.

And when he said "Three!" in they all went head first. My such a splash as they did make! They upset old Grandfather Frog so that he fell off his lily pad. They frightened Mr. and Mrs. Trout so that they jumped right out of the water. Tiny Tadpole had such a scare that he hid way, way down in the mud with only the tip of his funny little nose sticking out.

"Chug-a-rum," said old Grandfather Frog, climbing out of his lily pad. "If I wasn't so old I would show you how to dive."

"Come on, Grandfather Frog!" cried Billy Mink. "Show us how to dive."

And what do you think? Why, old Grandfather Frog actually got so excited that he climbed up on the Big Rock to show them how to dive. Splash! Went Grandfather Frog into the Smiling Pool. Splash! Went Billy Mink right behind him. Splash! Splash! Went Little Joe Otter and Jerry Muskrat, right at Billy Mink's heels.

"Hurrah!" shouted Mr. Kingfisher, sitting on a branch of the old beech tree. And then just to show them that he could dive, too, splash! He went into the Smiling Pool.

Such a noise as they did make! All the Little Breezes of Old Mother West Wind danced for joy on the bank. Blacky the Crow and Sammy Jay flew over to see what was going on.

"Now let's see who can swim the farthest under water," cried Billy Mink.

So they all stood side by side on one edge of the Smiling Pool.

"Go!" shouted Mr. Kingfisher, and in they all plunged. Little ripples ran across the Smiling Pool and then the water became as smooth and smiling as if nothing had gone into it with a plunge.

Now old Grandfather Frog began to realize that he wasn't as young as he used to be, and he couldn't swim as fast as the others anyway. He began to get short of breath, so he swam up to the top and stuck just the tip of his nose out to get some more air. Sammy Jay's sharp eyes saw him.

"There's Grandfather Frog!" he shouted.

So then Grandfather Frog popped his head out and swam over to his green lily pad to rest.

Way over beyond the Big Rock little bubbles in three long rows kept coming up to the top of the Smiling Pool. They showed just where Billy Mink, Little Joe Otter and Jerry Muskrat were swimming way down out of sight. It was the air from their lungs making the bubbles. Straight across the Smiling Pool went the lines of little bubbles and then way out on the farther side two little heads bobbed out of water close together. They were Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter. A moment later Jerry Muskrat bobbed up beside them.

You see, they had swum clear across the Smiling Pool and of course they could swim no farther.

So Billy Mink's swimming party was a great success.

CHAPTER IX

PETER RABBIT PLAYS A JOKE

One morning when big round Mr. Sun was climbing up in the sky and Old Mother West Wind had sent all her Merry Little Breezes to play in the Green Meadows, Johnny Chuck started out for a walk. First he sat up very straight and looked and looked all around to see if Reddy Fox was anywhere about, for you know Reddy Fox liked to tease Johnny Chuck.

But Reddy Fox was nowhere to be seen, so Johnny Chuck trotted down the Lone Little Path to the wood. Mr. Sun was shining as brightly as ever he could and Johnny Chuck, who was very, very fat, grew very, very warm. By and by he sat down on the end of a log under a big tree to rest.

Thump! Something hit Johnny Chuck right on the top of his round little head. It made Johnny Chuck jump.

"Hello, Johnny Chuck!" said a voice that seemed to come right out of the sky. Johnny Chuck tipped his head way, way back and looked up. He was just in time to see Happy Jack Squirrel drop a nut. Down it came and hit Johnny Chuck right on the tip of his funny, black, little nose.

"Oh!" said Johnny Chuck, and tumbled right over back off the log. But Johnny Chuck was so round and so fat and so roly-poly that it didn't hurt him a bit.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed Happy Jack up in the tree.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed Johnny Chuck, picking himself up. Then they both laughed together. It was such a good joke.

"What are you laughing at?" asked a voice so close to Johnny Chuck that he rolled over three times he was so surprised. It was Peter Rabbit.

"What are you doing in my wood?" asked Peter Rabbit.

"I'm taking a walk," said Johnny Chuck.

"Good," said Peter Rabbit, "I'll come along too."

So Johnny Chuck and Peter Rabbit set out along the Lone Little Path through the wood. Peter Rabbit hopped along with great big jumps, for Peter's legs are long and meant for jumping, but Johnny Chuck couldn't keep up though he tried very hard, for Johnny's legs are short. Pretty soon Peter Rabbit came back, walking very softly. He whispered in Johnny Chuck's ear.

"I've found something," said Peter Rabbit.

"What is it?" asked Johnny Chuck.

"I'll show you," said Peter Rabbit, "but you must be very, very still, and not make the least little bit of noise."

Johnny Chuck promised to be very, very still for he wanted very much to see what Peter Rabbit had found. Peter Rabbit tip-toed down the Lone Little Path through the wood, his funny long ears pointing right up to the sky. And behind him tip-toed Johnny Chuck, wondering and wondering what it could be that Peter Rabbit had found.

Pretty soon they came to a nice mossy green log right across the Lone Little Path. Peter Rabbit stopped and sat up very straight. He looked this way and looked that way. Johnny Chuck stopped too and he sat up very straight and looked this way and looked that way, but all he could see was the mossy green log across the Lone Little Path.

"What is it, Peter Rabbit?" whispered Johnny Chuck.

"You can't see it yet," whispered Peter Rabbit, "for first we have to jump over that mossy green log. Now I'll jump first, and then you jump just the way I do, and then you'll see what it is I've found," said Peter Rabbit.

So Peter Rabbit jumped first, and because his legs are long and meant for jumping, he jumped way, way over the mossy green log. Then he turned around and sat up to see Johnny Chuck jump over the mossy green log, too.

Johnny Chuck tried to jump very high and very far, just as he had seen Peter Rabbit jump, but Johnny Chuck's legs are very short and not meant for jumping. Besides, Johnny Chuck was very, very fat. So though he tried very hard indeed to jump just like Peter Rabbit, he stubbed his toes on the top of the mossy green log and over he tumbled, head first, and landed with a great big thump right on Reddy Fox, who was lying fast asleep on the other side of the mossy green log.

Peter Rabbit laughed and laughed until he had to hold his sides.

My, how frightened Johnny Chuck was when he saw what he had done! Before he could get on his feet he had rolled right over behind a little bush, and there he lay very, very still.

Reddy Fox awoke with a grunt when Johnny Chuck fell on him so hard, and the first thing he saw was Peter Rabbit laughing so that he had to hold his sides. Reddy Fox didn't stop to look around. He thought that Peter Rabbit had jumped on him. Up jumped Reddy Fox and away ran Peter Rabbit. Away went Reddy Fox after Peter Rabbit. Peter dodged behind the trees, and jumped over the bushes, and ran this way and ran that way, just as hard

as ever he could, for Peter Rabbit was very much afraid of Reddy Fox. And Reddy Fox followed Peter Rabbit behind the trees and over the bushes this way and that way, but he couldn't catch Peter Rabbit. Pretty soon Peter Rabbit came to the house of Jimmy Skunk. He knew that Jimmy Skunk was over in the pasture, so he popped right in and then he was safe, for the door of Jimmy Skunk's house was too small for Reddy Fox to squeeze in. Reddy Fox sat down and waited, but Peter Rabbit didn't come out. By and by Reddy Fox gave it up and trotted off home where old Mother Fox was waiting for him.

All this time Johnny Chuck had sat very still, watching Reddy Fox try to catch Peter Rabbit. And when he saw Peter Rabbit pop into the house of Jimmy Skunk and Reddy Fox trot away home, Johnny Chuck stood up and brushed his little coat very clean and then he trotted back up the Lone Little Path through the wood to his own dear little path through the Green Meadows where the Merry Little Breezes of Old Mother West Wind were still playing, till he was safe in his own snug little house once more.

CHAPTER X

HOW SAMMY JAY WAS FOUND OUT

Sammy Jay was very busy, very busy indeed. When anyone happened that way Sammy Jay pretended to be doing nothing at all, for Sammy Jay thought himself a very fine gentleman. He was very proud of his handsome blue coat with white trimmings and his high cap, and he would sit on a fence post and make fun of Johnny Chuck working at a new door for his snug little home in the Green Meadows, and of Striped Chipmunk storing up heaps of corn and nuts for the winter, for most of the time Sammy Jay was an idle fellow. And when Sammy Jay WAS busy, he was pretty sure to be doing something that he ought not to do, for idle people almost always get into mischief.

Sammy Jay was in mischief now, and that is why he pretended to be doing nothing when he thought any one was looking.

Old Mother West Wind had come down from her home behind the Purple Hills very early that morning. Indeed, jolly, round, red Mr. Sun had hardly gotten out of bed when she crossed the Green Meadows on her way to help the big ships across the ocean. Old Mother West Wind's eyes were sharp, and she saw Sammy Jay before Sammy Jay saw her.

"Now what can Sammy Jay be so busy about, and why is he so very, very quiet?" thought Old Mother West Wind. "He must be up to some mischief."

So when she opened her big bag and turned out all her Merry Little Breezes to play on the Green Meadows she sent one of them to see what Sammy Jay was doing in the old chestnut tree. The Merry Little Breeze danced along over the tree tops just as if he hadn't a thought in the world but to wake up all the little leaves and set them to dancing too, and Sammy Jay, watching Old Mother West Wind and the other Merry Little Breezes, didn't see this Merry Little Breeze at all.

Pretty soon it danced back to Old Mother West Wind and whispered in her ear: "Sammy Jay is stealing the nuts Happy Jack Squirrel had hidden in the hollow of the old chestnut tree, and is hiding them for himself in the tumble down nest that Blacky the Crow built in the Great Pine last year." "Aha!" said Old Mother West Wind. Then she went on across the Green Meadows.

"Good morning, Old Mother West Wind," said Sammy Jay as she passed the fence post where he was sitting.

"Good morning, Sammy Jay," said Old Mother West Wind. "What brings you out so early in the morning?"

"I'm out for my health, Old Mother West Wind," said Sammy Jay politely. "The doctor has ordered me to take a bath in the dew at sunrise every morning."

Old Mother West Wind said nothing, but went on her way across the Green Meadows to blow the ships across the ocean. When she had passed, Sammy Jay hurried to take the last of Happy Jack's nuts to the old nest in the Great Pine.

Poor Happy Jack! Soon he came dancing along with another nut to put in the hollow of the old chestnut tree. When he peeped in and saw that all his big store of nuts

had disappeared, he couldn't believe his own eyes. He put in one paw and felt all around but not a nut could he feel. Then he climbed in and sure enough, the hollow was empty.

Poor Happy Jack! There were tears in his eyes when he crept out again. He looked all around but no one was to be seen but handsome Sammy Jay, very busy brushing his beautiful blue coat.

"Good morning, Sammy Jay, have you seen any one pass this way?" asked Happy Jack. "Some one has stolen a store of nuts from the hollow in the old chestnut tree."

Sammy Jay pretended to feel very badly indeed, and in his sweetest voice, for his voice was very sweet in those days, he offered to help Happy Jack try to catch the thief who had stolen the store of nuts from the hollow in the old chestnut tree.

Together they went down cross the Green Meadows asking every one whom they met if they had seen the thief who had stolen Happy Jack's store of nuts from the hollow in the old chestnut tree. All the Merry Little Breezes joined in the search, and soon every one who lived in the Green Meadows or in the wood knew that some one had stolen all of Happy Jack Squirrel's store of nuts from the hollow in the old chestnut tree. And because every one liked Happy Jack, every one felt very sorry indeed for him.

The next morning all the Merry Little Breezes of Old Mother West Wind were turned out of the big bag into the Green Meadows very early indeed, for they had a lot of errands to do. All over the Green Meadows they hurried, all through the wood, up and down the Laughing Brook and all around the Smiling Pool, inviting everybody to meet at the Great Pine on the hill at nine o'clock to form

a committee of the whole—to try to find the thief who stole Happy Jack's nuts from the hollow in the old chestnut tree.

And because every one liked Happy Jack every one went to the Great Pine on the hill—Reddy Fox, Bobby Coon, Jimmy Skunk Striped Chipmunk, who is Happy Jack's cousin you know, Billy Mink, Little Joe Otter, Jerry Muskrat, Hooty the Owl, who was almost too sleepy to keep his eyes open, Blacky the Crow, Johnny Chuck, Peter Rabbit, even old Grandfather Frog. Of course Sammy Jay was there, looking his handsomest.

When they had all gathered around the Great Pine, Old Mother West Wind pointed to the old nest way up in the top of it. "Is that your nest?" she asked Blacky the Crow.

"It was, but I gave it to my cousin, Sammy Jay," said Blacky the Crow.

"Is that your nest, and may I have a stick out of it?" asked Old Mother West Wind of Sammy Jay.

"It is," said Sammy Jay, with his politest bow, "And you are welcome to a stick out of it." To himself he thought, "She will only take one from the top and that won't matter."

Old Mother West Wind suddenly puffed out her cheeks and blew so hard that she blew a big stick right out of the bottom of the old nest. Down it fell bumpity-bump on the branches of the Great Pine. After it fell—what do you think? Why, hickory nuts and chestnuts and acorns and hazel nuts, such a lot of them!

"Why! Why—e—e!" cried Happy Jack. "There are all my stolen nuts!"

Everybody turned to look at Sammy Jay, but he was flying off through the wood as fast as he could go. "Stop

thief!" cried Old Mother West Wind. "Stop thief!" cried all the Merry Little Breezes and Johnny Chuck and Billy Mink and all the rest. But Sammy Jay didn't stop.

Then all began to pick up the nuts that had fallen from the old nest where Sammy Jay had hidden them. By and by, with Happy Jack leading the way, they all marched back to the old chestnut tree and there Happy Jack stored all the nuts away in his snug little hollow once more.

And ever since that day, Sammy Jay, whenever he tries to call, just screams: "Thief!" "Thief!" "Thief!"

CHAPTER XI

JERRY MUSKRAT'S PARTY

All the Merry Little Breezes of Old Mother West Wind were hurrying over the Green Meadows. Some flew this way and some ran that way and some danced the other way. You see, Jerry Muskrat had asked them to carry his invitations to a party at the Big Rock in the Smiling Pool.

Of course every one said that they would be delighted to go to Jerry Muskrat's party. Round Mr. Sun shone his very brightest. The sky was its bluest and the little birds had promised to be there to sing for Jerry Muskrat, so of course all the little folks in the Green Meadows and in the wood wanted to go.

There were Johnny Chuck and Reddy Fox and Jimmy Skunk and Bobby Coon and Happy Jack Squirrel and Striped Chipmunk and Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter and Grandfather Frog and old Mr. Toad and Mr. Blacksnake—all going to Jerry Muskrat's party.

When they reached the Smiling Pool they found Jerry Muskrat all ready. His brothers and his sister, his aunts and his uncles and his cousins were all there. Such a merry, merry time as there was in the Smiling Pool! How the water did splash! Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter and Grandfather Frog jumped right in as soon as they got there. They played tag in the water and hid behind the Big Rock. They turned somersaults down the slippery slide and they had such a good time!

But Reddy Fox and Peter Rabbit and Bobby Coon and Johnny Chuck and Jimmy Skunk and Happy Jack and Striped Chipmunk couldn't swim, so of course they couldn't play tag in the water or hide and seek or go down the slippery slide; all they could do was sit around to look on and wish that they knew how to swim, too. So of course they didn't have a good time. Soon they began to wish that they hadn't come to Jerry Muskrat's party. When he found that they were not having a good time, poor Jerry Muskrat felt very badly indeed. You see he lives in the water so much that he had quite forgotten that there was anyone who couldn't swim, or he never, never would have invited all the little meadow folks who live on dry land.

"Let's go home," said Peter Rabbit to Johnny Chuck.

"We can have more fun up on the hill," said Jimmy Skunk.

Just then Little Joe Otter came pushing a great big log across the Smiling Pool.

"Here's a ship, Bobby Coon. You get on one end and I'll give you a sail across the Smiling Pool," shouted Little Joe Otter.

So Bobby Coon crawled out on the big log and held on very tight, while little Joe Otter swam behind and pushed the big log. Across the Smiling Pool they went and back again. Bobby Coon had such a good ride that he wanted to go again, but Jimmy Skunk wanted a ride. So Bobby Coon hopped off of the big log and Jimmy Skunk hopped on and away he went across the Smiling Pool with little Joe Otter pushing behind.

Then Jerry Muskrat found another log and gave Peter Rabbit a ride. Jerry Muskrat's brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles and cousins found logs and took Reddy

Fox and Johnny Chuck and even Mr. Toad back and forth across the Smiling Pool.

Happy Jack Squirrel sat up very straight on the end of his log and spread his great bushy tail for a sail. All the little Breezes blew and blew and Happy Jack Squirrel sailed round and round the Smiling Pool.

Sometimes someone would fall off into the water and get wet, but Jerry Muskrat or Billy Mink always pulled them out again, and no one cared the tiniest bit for a wetting.

In the bushes around the Smiling Pool the little birds sang and sang. Reddy Fox barked his loudest. Happy Jack Squirrel chattered and chir—r—r—ed. All the muskrats squealed and squeaked, for Jerry Muskrat's party was such fun!

By and by when Mr. Sun went down behind the Purple Hills to his home and Old Mother West Wind with all her Merry Little Breezes went after him, and the little stars came out to twinkle and twinkle, the Smiling Pool lay all quiet and still, but smiling and smiling to think what a good time every one had had at Jerry Muskrat's party.

CHAPTER XII

BOBBY COON AND REDDY FOX PLAY TRICKS

It was night. All the little stars were looking down and twinkling and twinkling. Mother Moon was doing her best to make the Green Meadows as light as Mr. Sun did in the daytime. All the little birds except Hooty the Owl and Boomer the Night Hawk, and noisy Mr. Whip-poor-will were fast asleep in their little nests. Old Mother West Wind's Merry Little Breezes had all gone to sleep, too. It was oh so still! Indeed it was so very still that Bobby Coon, coming down the Lone Little Path through the wood, began to talk to himself.

"I don't see what people want to play all day and sleep all night for," said Bobby Coon. "Night's the best time to be about. Now Reddy Fox—"

"Be careful what you say about Reddy Fox," said a voice right behind Bobby Coon.

Bobby Coon turned around very quickly indeed, for he had thought he was all alone. There was Reddy Fox himself, trotting down the Lone Little Path through the wood.

"I thought you were home and fast asleep, Reddy Fox," said Bobby Coon.

"You were mistaken," said Reddy Fox. "For you see I'm out to take a walk in the moonlight."

So Bobby Coon and Reddy Fox walked together down the Lone Little Path through the wood to the Green Meadows. They met Jimmy Skunk, who had dreamed that there were a lot of beetles up on the hill, and was just going to climb the Crooked Little Path to see.

"Hello, Jimmy Skunk!" said Bobby Coon and Reddy Fox. "Come down to the Green Meadows with us."

Jimmy Skunk said he would, so they all went down on the Green Meadows together, Bobby Coon first, Reddy Fox next and Jimmy Skunk last of all, for Jimmy Skunk never hurries. Pretty soon they came to the house of Johnny Chuck.

"Listen," said Bobby Coon. "Johnny Chuck is fast asleep."

They all listened and they could hear Johnny Chuck snoring away down in his snug little bed.

"Let's give Johnny Chuck a surprise," said Reddy Fox.

"What shall it be?" asked Bobby Coon.

"I know," said Reddy Fox. "Let's roll that big stone right over Johnny Chuck's doorway; then he'll have to dig his way out in the morning."

So Bobby Coon and Reddy Fox pulled and tugged and tugged and pulled at the big stone till they had rolled it over Johnny Chuck's doorway. Jimmy Skunk pretended not to see what they were doing.

"Now let's go down to the Laughing Brook and wake up old Grandfather Frog and hear him say 'Chug-a-rum,'" said Bobby Coon.

"Come on!" cried Reddy Fox, "I'll get there first!"

Away raced Reddy Fox down the Lone Little Path and after him ran Bobby Coon, going to wake old Grandfather Frog from a nice comfortable sleep on his green lily pad.

But Jimmy Skunk didn't go. He watched Reddy Fox and Bobby Coon until they were nearly to the Laughing Brook. Then he began to dig at one side of the big stone which filled the doorway of Johnny Chuck's house. My, how he made the dirt fly! Pretty soon he had made a hole big enough to call through to Johnny Chuck, who was snoring away, fast asleep in his snug little bed below.

"Johnny Chuck, Chuck, Chuck! Johnny Woodchuck!" called Jimmy Skunk.

But Johnny Chuck just snored.

"Johnny Chuck, Chuck, Chuck! Johnny Woodchuck!" called Jimmy Skunk once more.

But Johnny Chuck just snored. Then Jimmy Skunk called again, this time louder than before.

"Who is it?" asked a very sleepy voice.

"It's Jimmy Skunk. Put your coat on and come up here!" called Jimmy Skunk.

"Go away, Jimmy Skunk. I want to sleep!" said Johnny Chuck.

"I've got a surprise for you, Johnny Chuck. You'd better come!" called Jimmy Skunk through the little hole he had made. When Johnny Chuck heard that Jimmy Skunk had a surprise for him he wanted to know right away what it could be, so though he was very, very sleepy, he put on his coat and started up for his door to see what the surprise was that Jimmy Skunk had. And there he found the big stone Reddy Fox and Bobby Coon had put there, and of course he was very much surprised indeed. He thought Jimmy Skunk had played him a mean trick and for a few minutes he was very mad. But Jimmy Skunk soon told him who had filled up his doorway with the big stone.

"Now you push from that side, Johnny Chuck, and I'll pull from this side, and we'll soon have this big stone out of your doorway," said Jimmy Skunk.

So Johnny Chuck pushed and Jimmy Skunk pulled, and sure enough they soon had the big stone out of Johnny Chuck's doorway.

"Now," said Jimmy Skunk, "we'll roll this big stone down the Lone Little Path to Reddy Fox's house and we'll give Reddy Fox a surprise."

So Johnny Chuck and Jimmy Skunk tugged and pulled and rolled the big stone down to the house of Reddy Fox, and sure enough, it filled his doorway.

"Good night, Jimmy Skunk," said Johnny Chuck, and trotted down the Lone Little Path toward home, chuckling to himself all the way.

Jimmy Skunk walked slowly up the Lone Little Path to the wood, for Jimmy Skunk never hurries. Pretty soon he came to the big hollow tree where Bobby Coon lives, and there he met Hooty the Owl.

"Hello, Jimmy Skunk, where have you been?" asked Hooty the Owl.

"Just for a walk," said Jimmy Skunk. "Who lives in this big hollow tree?"

Now of course Jimmy Skunk knew all the time, but he pretended he didn't.

"Oh, this is Bobby Coon's house," said Hooty the Owl.

"Let's give Bobby Coon a surprise," said Jimmy Skunk.

"How?" asked Hooty the Owl.

"We'll fill his house full of sticks and leaves," said Jimmy Skunk.

Hooty the Owl thought that would be a good joke so while Jimmy Skunk gathered all the old sticks and leaves

he could find, Hooty the Owl stuffed them into the old hollow tree which was Bobby Coon's house, until he couldn't get in another one.

"Good night," said Jimmy Skunk as he began to climb the Crooked Little Path up the hill to his own snug little home.

"Good night," said Hooty the Owl, as he flew like a big soft shadow over to the Great Pine.

By and by when old Mother Moon was just going to bed and all the little stars were too sleepy to twinkle any longer, Reddy Fox and Bobby Coon, very tired and very wet from playing in the Laughing Brook, came up the Lone Little Path, ready to tumble into their snug little beds. They were chuckling over the trick they had played on Johnny Chuck, and the way they had waked up old Grandfather Frog, and all the other mischief they had done. What do you suppose they said when they reached their homes and found that someone else had been playing jokes, too?

I'm sure I don't know, but round, red Mr. Sun was laughing very hard as he peeped over the hill at Reddy Fox and Bobby Coon, and he won't tell why.

CHAPTER XIII

JOHNNY CHUCK FINDS THE BEST THING IN THE WORLD

Old Mother West Wind had stopped to talk with the Slender Fir Tree. "I've just come across the Green Meadows," said Old Mother West Wind, "and there I saw the Best Thing in the World."

Striped Chipmunk was sitting under the Slender Fir Tree and he couldn't help hearing what Old Mother West Wind said. "The Best Thing in the World—now what can that be?" thought Striped Chipmunk. "Why, it must be heaps and heaps of nuts and acorns! I'll go and find it."

So Striped Chipmunk started down the Lone Little Path through the wood as fast as he could run. Pretty soon he met Peter Rabbit.

"Where are you going in such a hurry, Striped Chipmunk?" asked Peter Rabbit.

"Down in the Green Meadows to find the Best Thing in the World," replied Striped Chipmunk, and ran faster.

"The Best Thing in the World," said Peter Rabbit. "Why, that must be great piles of carrots and cabbage! I think I'll go and find it."

So Peter Rabbit started down the Lone Little Path through the wood as fast as he could go after Striped Chipmunk.

As they passed the great hollow tree Bobby Coon put his head out. "Where are you going in such a hurry?" asked Bobby Coon.

"Down in the Green Meadows to find the Best Thing in the World!" shouted Striped Chipmunk and Peter Rabbit, and both began to run faster.

"The Best Thing in the World," said Bobby Coon to himself. "Why, that must be a whole field of sweet milky corn. I think I'll go and find it."

So Bobby Coon climbed down out of the great hollow tree and started down the Lone Little Path through the wood as fast as he could go after Striped Chipmunk and Peter Rabbit, for there is nothing that Bobby Coon likes to eat so well as sweet milky corn.

At the edge of the wood they met Jimmy Skunk.

"Where are you going in such a hurry?" asked Jimmy Skunk.

"Down in the Green Meadows to find the Best Thing in the World!" shouted Striped Chipmunk and Peter Rabbit and Bobby Coon. Then they all tried to run faster.

"The Best Thing in the World," said Jimmy Skunk. "Why, that must be packs and packs of beetles!" And for once in his life Jimmy Skunk began to hurry down the Lone Little Path after Striped Chipmunk and Peter Rabbit and Bobby Coon.

They were all running so fast that they didn't see Reddy Fox until he jumped out of the long grass and asked: "Where are you going in such a hurry?"

"To find the Best Thing in the World!" shouted Striped Chipmunk and Peter Rabbit and Bobby Coon and Jimmy Skunk, and each did his best to run faster.

"The Best Thing in the World," said Reddy Fox to himself. "Why, that must be a whole pen full of tender young chickens, and I must have them."

So away went Reddy Fox as fast as he could run down the Lone Little Path after Striped Chipmunk, Peter Rabbit, Bobby Coon and Jimmy Skunk.

By and by they all came to the house of Johnny Chuck.

"Where are you going in such a hurry?" asked Johnny Chuck.

"To find the Best Thing in the World," shouted Striped Chipmunk and Peter Rabbit and Bobby Coon and Jimmy Skunk and Reddy Fox.

"The Best Thing in the World," said Johnny Chuck. "Why, I don't know of anything better than my own little home and the warm sunshine and the beautiful blue sky."

So Johnny Chuck stayed at home and played all day among the flowers with the Merry Little Breezes of Old Mother West Wind and was as happy as could be.

But all day long Striped Chipmunk and Peter Rabbit and Bobby Coon and Jimmy Skunk and Reddy Fox ran this way and ran that way over the Green Meadows trying to find the Best Thing in the World. The sun was very, very warm and they ran so far and they ran so fast that they were very, very hot and tired, and still they hadn't found the Best Thing in the World.

When the long day was over they started up the Lone Little Path past Johnny Chuck's house to their own homes. They didn't hurry now for they were so very, very tired! And they were cross—oh so cross! Striped Chipmunk hadn't found a single nut. Peter Rabbit hadn't found so much as the leaf of a cabbage. Bobby Coon hadn't found the tiniest bit of sweet milky corn. Jimmy Skunk hadn't

seen a single beetle. Reddy Fox hadn't heard so much as the peep of a chicken. And all were as hungry as hungry could be.

Half way up the Lone Little Path they met Old Mother West Wind going to her home behind the hill. "Did you find the Best Thing in the World?" asked Old Mother West Wind.

"NO!" shouted Striped Chipmunk and Peter Rabbit and Bobby Coon and Jimmy Skunk and Reddy Fox all together.

"Johnny Chuck has it," said Old Mother West Wind. "It is being happy with the things you have and not wanting things which some one else has. And it is called Con-tent-ment."

CHAPTER XIV

LITTLE JOE OTTER'S SLIPPERY SLIDE

Little Joe Otter and Billy Mink had been playing together around the Smiling Pool all one sunshiny morning. They had been fishing and had taken home a fine dinner of Trout for old Grandfather Mink and blind old Granny Otter. They had played tag with the Merry Little Breezes. They had been in all kinds of mischief and now they just didn't know what to do.

They were sitting side by side on the Big Rock trying to push each other off into the Smiling Pool. Round, smiling red Mr. Sun made the Green Meadows very warm indeed, and Reddy Fox, over in the tall grass, heard them splashing and shouting and having such a good time that he wished he liked the nice cool water and could swim, too.

"I've thought of something!" cried Little Joe Otter.

"What is it?" asked Billy Mink.

Little Joe Otter just looked wise and said nothing.

"Something to eat?" asked Billy Mink.

"No," said Little Joe Otter.

"I don't believe you've a thought of anything at all," said Billy Mink.

"I have too!" said Little Joe Otter. "It's something to do."

"What?" demanded Billy Mink.

Just then Little Joe Otter spied Jerry Muskrat. "Hi, Jerry Muskrat! Come over here!" he called.

Jerry Muskrat swam across to the Big Rock and climbed up beside Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter.

"What are you fellows doing?" asked Jerry Muskrat.

"Having some fun," said Billy Mink. "Little Joe Otter has thought of something to do, but I don't know what it is."

"Let's make a slide," cried Little Joe Otter.

"You show us how," said Billy Mink.

So Little Joe Otter found a nice smooth place on the bank, and Billy Mink and Jerry Muskrat brought mud and helped him pat it down smooth until they had the loveliest slippery slide in the world. Then Little Joe Otter climbed up the bank to the top of the slippery slide and lay down flat on his stomach. Billy Mink gave a push and away he went down, down the slippery slide, splash into the Smiling Pool. Then Jerry Muskrat tried it and after him Billy Mink. Then all did it over again. Sometimes they went down the slippery slide on their backs, sometimes flat on their stomachs, sometimes head first, sometimes feet first. Oh such fun as they did have! Even Grandfather Frog came over and tried the slippery slide.

Johnny Chuck, over in the Green Meadows, heard the noise and stole down the Lone Little Path to see. Jimmy Skunk, looking for beetles up on the hill, heard the noise and forgot that he hadn't had his breakfast. Reddy Fox, taking a nap, woke up and hurried over to watch the fun. Last of all came Peter Rabbit.

Little Joe Otter saw him coming. "Hello, Peter Rabbit!" he shouted. "Come and try the slippery slide."

Now Peter Rabbit couldn't swim, but he pretended that he didn't want to.

"I've left my bathing suit at home," said Peter Rabbit.

"Never mind," said Billy Mink. "Mr. Sun will dry you off."

"And we'll help," said all the Merry Little Breezes of Old Mother West Wind.

But Peter Rabbit shook his head and said, "No."

Faster and faster went Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter and Jerry Muskrat and old Grandfather Frog down the slippery slide into the Smiling Pool.

Peter Rabbit kept coming nearer and nearer until finally he stood right at the top of the slippery slide. Billy Mink crept up behind him very softly and gave him a push. Peter Rabbit's long legs flew out from under him and down he sat with a thump on the slippery slide. "Oh," cried Peter Rabbit, and tried to stop himself. But he couldn't do it and so away he went down the slippery slide, splash into the Smiling Pool.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Billy Mink.

"Ho! ho! ho!" shouted Little Joe Otter.

"He! he! he!" laughed Jerry Muskrat and old Grandfather Frog and Sammy Jay and Jimmy Skunk and Reddy Fox and Blacky the Crow and Mr. Kingfisher, for you know Peter Rabbit was forever playing jokes on them.

Poor Peter Rabbit! The water got in his eyes and up his nose and into his mouth and made him choke and splutter, and then he couldn't get back on the bank, for you know Peter Rabbit couldn't swim.

When Little Joe Otter saw what a dreadful time Peter Rabbit was having he dove into the Smiling Pool and took hold of one of Peter Rabbit's long ears. Billy Mink swam out and took hold of the other long ear. Jerry Muskrat swam right under Peter Rabbit and took him on his back. Then with old Grandfather Frog swimming ahead they

took Peter Rabbit right across the Smiling Pool and pulled him out on the grassy bank, where it was nice and warm. All the Merry Little Breezes of Old Mother West Wind came over and helped Mr. Sun dry Peter Rabbit off.

Then they all sat down together and watched Little Joe Otter turn a somersault down the slippery slide.

CHAPTER XV

THE TAIL OF TOMMY TROUT WHO DID NOT MIND

In the Laughing Brook, which rippled and sings all day long, lived Mr. Trout and Mrs. Trout, and a whole lot of little Trouts. There were so many little Trouts that Mr. Trout and Mrs. Trout were kept very busy indeed getting breakfast and dinner and supper for them, and watching out for them and teaching them how to swim and how to catch foolish little flies that sometimes fell on the water and how to keep out of the way of big hungry fish and sharp eyed Mr. Kingfisher and big men and little boys who came fishing with hooks and lines.

Now all the little Trouts were very, very good and minded just what Mrs. Trout told them—all but Tommy Trout, for Tommy Trout—oh, dear, dear! Tommy Trout never could mind right away. He always had to wait a little instead of minding when he was spoken to.

Tommy Trout didn't mean to be bad. Oh dear, no! He just wanted to have his own way, and because Tommy Trout had his own way and didn't mind Mrs. Trout there isn't any Tommy Trout now. No sir, there isn't as much as one little blue spot of his beautiful little coat left because—why, just because Tommy Trout didn't mind.

One day when round, red Mr. Sun was shining and the Laughing Brook was singing on its way to join the Big River, Mrs. Trout started to get some nice plump flies for

dinner. All the little Trouts were playing in their dear little pool, safe behind the Big Rock. Before she started Mrs. Trout called all the little Trouts around her and told them not to leave their little pool while she was gone, "For," said she, "something dreadful might happen to you."

All the little Trouts, except Tommy Trout, promised that they would surely, surely stay inside their dear little pool. Then they all began to jump and chase each other and play as happy as could be, all but Tommy Trout.

As soon as Mrs. Trout had started, Tommy Trout swam off by himself to the edge of the pool. "I wonder what is on the other side of the Big Rock," said Tommy Trout. "The sun is shining and the brook is laughing and nothing could happen if I go just a little speck of a ways."

So, when no one was looking, Tommy Trout slipped out of the safe little pool where all the other little Trouts were playing. He swam just a little speck of a ways farther still. Now he could see almost around the Big Rock. Then he swam just a little speck of a ways farther and—oh dear, dear! he looked right into the mouth of a great big, big fish called Mr. Pickerel, who is very fond of little Trouts and would like to eat one for breakfast every day.

"Ah ha!" said Mr. Pickerel, opening his big, big mouth very, very wide.

Tommy Trout turned to run back to the dear, dear safe little pool where all the other little Trouts were playing so happily, but he was too late. Into that great big, big mouth he went instead, and Mr. Pickerel swallowed him whole.

"Ah ha," said Mr. Pickerel, "I like little Trouts."

And nothing more was ever heard of Tommy Trout, who didn't mind.

CHAPTER XVI

SPOTTY THE TURTLE WINS A RACE

All the little people who live on the Green Meadows and in the Smiling Pool and along the Laughing Brook were to have a holiday. The Merry Little Breezes of Old Mother West Wind had been very busy, oh very busy indeed, in sending word to all the little meadow folks. You see, Peter Rabbit had been boasting of how fast he could run. Reddy Fox was quite sure that he could run faster than Peter Rabbit. Billy Mink, who can move so quickly you hardly can see him, was quite sure that neither Peter Rabbit nor Reddy Fox could run as fast as he. They all met one day beside the Smiling Pool and agreed that old Grandfather Frog should decide who was the swiftest.

Now Grandfather Frog was accounted very wise. You see he had lived a long time, oh, very much longer than any of the others, and therefore, because of the wisdom of age, Grandfather Frog was always called on to decide all disputes. He sat on his green lily-pad while Billy Mink sat on the Big Rock, and Peter Rabbit and Reddy Fox sat on the bank. Each in turn told why he thought he was the fastest. Old Grandfather Frog listened and listened and said never a word until they were all through. When they had finished, he stopped to catch a foolish green fly and then he said: "The best way to decide who is the swiftest is to have a race."

So it was agreed that Peter Rabbit and Reddy Fox and Billy Mink should start together from the old butternut tree on one edge of the Green Meadows, race away across the Green Meadows to the little hill on the other side and each bring back a nut from the big hickory which grew there. The one who first reached the old butternut tree with a hickory nut would be declared the winner. The Merry Little Breezes flew about over the Green Meadows telling everyone about the race and everyone planned to be there.

It was a beautiful summer day. Mr. Sun smiled and smiled, and the more he smiled the warmer it grew. Everyone was there to see the race—Striped Chipmunk, Happy Jack Squirrel, Sammy Jay, Blacky the Crow, Hooty the Owl and Bobby Coon all sat up in the old butternut tree where it was cool and shady. Johnny Chuck, Jerry Muskrat, Jimmy Skunk, Little Joe Otter, Grandfather Frog and even old Mr. Toad, were there. Last of all came Spotty the Turtle. Now Spotty the Turtle is a very slow walker, and he cannot run at all. When Peter Rabbit saw him coming up towards the old butternut tree he shouted: "Come, Spotty, don't you want to race with us?"

Everybody laughed because you know Spotty is so very, very slow but Spotty didn't laugh and he didn't get cross because everyone else laughed.

"There is a wise old saying, Peter Rabbit," said Spotty the Turtle, "which shows that those who run fastest do not always reach a place first. I think I WILL enter this race."

Every one thought that that was the best joke they had heard for a long time, and all laughed harder than ever. They all agreed that Spotty the Turtle should start in the race too.

So they all stood in a row, Peter Rabbit first, the Billy Mink, then Reddy Fox, and right side of Reddy Fox Spotty the Turtle.

"Are you ready?" asked Grandfather Frog. "Go!"

Away went Peter Rabbit with great big jumps. After him went Billy Mink so fast that was just a little brown streak going through the tall grass, and side by side with him ran Reddy Fox. Now just as they started Spotty the Turtle reached up and grabbed the long hair on the end of Reddy's big tail. Of course Reddy couldn't have stopped to shake him off, because Peter Rabbit and Billy Mink were running so fast that he had to run his very best to keep up with them. But he didn't even know that Spotty the Turtle was there. You see Spotty is not very heavy and Reddy Fox was so excited that he did not notice that his big tail was heavier than usual.

The Merry Little Breezes flew along, too, to see that the race was fair. Peter Rabbit went with great big jumps. Whenever he came to a little bush he jumped right over it, for Peter Rabbit's legs are long and meant for jumping. Billy Mink is so slim that he slipped between the bushes and through the long grass like a little brown streak. Reddy Fox, who is bigger than either Peter Rabbit or Billy Mink, had no trouble in keeping up with them. Not one of them noticed that Spotty the Turtle was hanging fast to the end of Reddy's tail.

Now just at the foot of the little hill on which the big hickory tree grew was a little pond. It wasn't very wide but it was quite long. Billy Mink remembered this pond and he chuckled to himself as he raced along, for he knew that Peter Rabbit couldn't swim and he knew that Reddy Fox does not like the water, so therefore both would have to

run around it. He himself can swim even faster than he can run. The more he thought of this, the more foolish it seemed that he should hurry so on such a warm day. "For," said Billy Mink to himself, "even if they reach the pond first, they will have to run around it, while I can swim across it and cool off while I am swimming. I will surely get there first." So Billy Mink ran slower and slower, and pretty soon he had dropped behind.

Mr. Sun, round and red, looking down, smiled and smiled to see the race. The more he smiled the warmer it grew. Now, Peter Rabbit had a thick gray coat and Reddy Fox had a thick red coat, and they both began to get very, very warm. Peter Rabbit did not make such long jumps as when he first started. Reddy Fox began to feel very thirsty, and his tongue hung out. Now that Billy Mink was behind them they thought they did not need to hurry so.

Peter Rabbit reached the little pond first. He had not thought of that pond when he agreed to enter the race. He stopped right on the edge of it and sat up on his hind legs. Right across he could see the big hickory tree, so near and yet so far, for he knew that he must run around the pond then back again, and it was a long, long way. In just a moment Reddy Fox ran out of the bushes and Reddy felt much as Peter Rabbit did. Way, way behind them was Billy Mink, trotting along comfortably and chuckling to himself. Peter Rabbit looked at Reddy Fox in dismay, and Reddy Fox looked at Peter Rabbit in dismay. Then they both looked at Billy Mink and remembered that Billy Mink could swim right across.

Then off Peter Rabbit started as fast as he could go around the pond one way, and Reddy Fox started around the pond the other way. They were so excited that neither

noticed a little splash in the pond. That was Spotty the Turtle who had let go of Reddy's tail and now was swimming across the pond, for you know that Spotty is a splendid swimmer. Only once or twice he stuck his little black nose up to get some air. The rest of the time he swam under water and no one but the Merry Little Breezes saw him. Right across he swam, and climbed up the bank right under the big hickory tree.

Now there were just three nuts left under the hickory trees. Two of these Spotty took down to the edge of the pond and buried in the mud. The other he took in his mouth and started back across the pond. Just as he reached the other shore up trotted Billy Mink, but Billy Mink didn't see Spotty. He was too intent watching Reddy Fox and Peter Rabbit, who were now half way around the pond. In he jumped with a splash. My! How good that cool water did feel! He didn't have to hurry now, because he felt sure that the race was his. So he swam round and round and chased some fish and had a beautiful time in the water. By and by he looked up and saw that Peter Rabbit was almost around the pond one way and Reddy Fox was almost around the pond the other way. They both looked tired and hot and discouraged.

Then Billy Mink swam slowly across and climbed out on the bank under the big hickory tree. But where were the nuts? Look as he would, he could not see a nut anywhere, yet the Merry Little Breezes had said there were three nuts lying under the hickory tree. Billy Mink ran this way and ran that way. He was still running around, poking over the leaves and looking under the twigs and pieces of bark when Peter Rabbit and Reddy Fox came up.

Then they, too, began to look under the leaves and under the bark. They pawed around in the grass, they hunted in every nook and cranny, but not a nut could they find. They were tired and cross and hot and they accused Billy Mink of having hidden the nuts. Billy Mink stoutly insisted that he had not hidden the nuts, that he had not found the nuts, and when they saw how hard he was hunting they believed him.

All the afternoon they hunted and hunted and hunted, and all the afternoon Spotty the Turtle, with the nut in his mouth, was slowly, oh, so slowly, crawling straight back across the Green Meadows towards the old butternut tree. Round, red Mr. Sun was getting very close to the Purple Hills, where he goes to bed every night, and all the little meadow folks were getting ready to go to their homes. They were wondering and wondering what could have happened to the racers, when Sammy Jay spied the Merry Little Breezes dancing across the Green Meadows.

"Here come the Merry Little Breezes; they'll tell us who wins the race," cried Sammy Jay.

When the Merry Little Breezes reached the old butternut tree, all the little meadow folks crowded around them, but the Merry Little Breezes just laughed and laughed and wouldn't say a word. Then all of a sudden, out of the tall meadow grass crept Spotty the Turtle and laid the hickory nut at the feet of old Grandfather Frog. Old Grandfather Frog was so surprised that he actually let a great green fly buzz right past his nose.

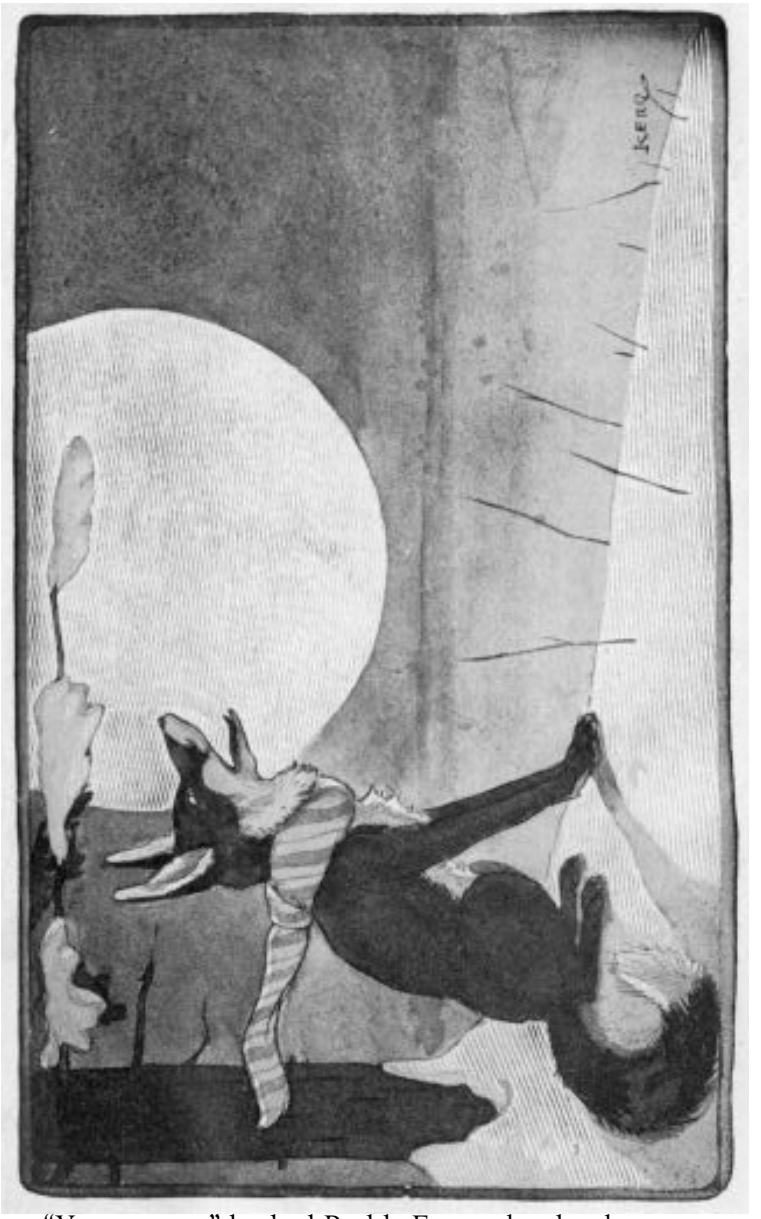
"Where did you get that hickory nut?" asked Grandfather Frog.

"Under the big hickory tree on the hill on the other side of the Green Meadows," said Spotty.

Then all the Merry Little Breezes clapped their hands and shouted: "He did! He did! Spotty wins the race!"

Then they told how Spotty reached the pond by clinging to the tip of Reddy Fox's tail, and had hidden the other two nuts, and then how he had patiently crawled home while Billy Mink and Reddy Fox and Peter Rabbit were hunting and hunting and hunting for the nuts they could not find.

And so Spotty the Turtle was awarded the race, and to this day Peter Rabbit and Reddy Fox and Billy Mink can't bear the sight of a hickory nut.



"Yap-yap-yap," barked Reddy Fox, as loud as he could.

MOTHER WEST WIND'S CHILDREN

BY THORNTON W. BURGESS
Illustrated by George Kerr

To all the little friends of Johnny Chuck and Reddy Fox, and to all who love the green meadows and the smiling pool, the laughing brook and the merry little breezes, this little book is dedicated

CHAPTER I

DANNY MEADOW MOUSE LEARNS WHY HIS TAIL IS SHORT

Danny Meadow Mouse sat in his doorway and looked down the Lone Little Path across the Green Meadows. Way, way over near the Smiling Pool he could see Old Mother West Wind's Children, the Merry Little Breezes, at play. Sammy Jay was sitting on a fence post. He pretended to be taking a sun bath, but really he was planning mischief. You never see Sammy Jay that he isn't in mischief or planning it.

Reddy Fox had trotted past an hour before in a great hurry. Up on the hill Danny Meadow Mouse could just see Jimmy Skunk pulling over every old stick and stone he could find, no matter whose house it might be, and excusing himself because he was hungry and was looking for beetles.

Jolly, round, red Mr. Sun was playing at hide and seek behind some fleecy white clouds. All the birds were singing and singing, and the world was happy—all but Danny Meadow Mouse.

No, Danny Meadow Mouse was not happy. Indeed, he was very far from happy, and all because his tail was short.

By and by up came old Mr. Toad. It was a warm day and Mr. Toad was very hot and very, very thirsty. He stopped to rest beside the house of Danny Meadow Mouse.

"Good morning, Danny Meadow Mouse," said old Mr. Toad, "it's a fine morning."

"Morning," said Danny Meadow Mouse, grumpily.

"I hope your health is good this morning," continued old Mr. Toad, just as if he hadn't noticed how short and cross Danny Meadow Mouse had answered.

Now old Mr. Toad is very ugly to look upon, but the ugliness is all in his looks. He has the sunniest of hearts and always he is looking for a chance to help someone.

"Danny Meadow Mouse," said old Mr. Toad, "you make me think of your grandfather a thousand times removed. You do indeed. You look just as he did when he lost the half of his tail and realized that he never, never could get it back again."

Danny Meadow Mouse sat up suddenly.

"What are you talking about, old Mr. Toad? What are you talking about?" he asked. "Did my grandfather a thousand times removed lose the half of his tail, and was it shorter then than mine is now? Was it, old Mr. Toad? And how did he come to lose the half of it?"

Old Mr. Toad laughed a funny silent laugh. "It's a long story," said old Mr. Toad, "and I'm afraid I can't tell it. Go down to the Smiling Pool and ask Great-Grandfather Frog, who is my first cousin, how it happened your grandfather a thousand times removed lost the half of his tail. But before you go catch three fat, foolish, green flies and take them with you as a present to Grandfather Frog."

Danny Meadow Mouse could hardly wait for old Mr. Toad to stop speaking. In fact, he was in such a hurry that

he almost forgot his manners. Not quite, however, for he shouted "Thank you, Mr. Toad, thank you!" over his shoulder as he rushed off down the Lone Little Path.

You see his short tail had always been a matter of mortification to Danny Meadow Mouse. All his cousins in the Mouse family and the Rat family have long, smooth, tapering tails, and they have always been a source of envy to Danny Meadow Mouse. He had felt his queer short tail to be a sort of disgrace. So when he would meet one of his cousins dancing down the Lone Little Path, with his long, slim, tapering tail behind him, Danny Meadow Mouse would slip out of sight under the long grass, he was so ashamed of his own little tail. It looked so mean and small! He had wondered and wondered if the Meadow Mice had always had short tails. He used to ask everyone who came his way if they had ever seen a Meadow Mouse with a long tail, but he had never found any one who had.

"Perhaps," thought Danny Meadow Mouse as he hurried down the Lone Little Path, "perhaps Grandfather Frog, who is very wise, will know why my tail is short."

So he hurried this way and he hurried that way over the Green Meadows in search of fat, foolish, green flies. And when he had caught three, he caught one more for good measure. Then he started for the Smiling Pool as fast as his short legs would take him.

When finally he reached the edge of the Smiling Pool he was quite out of breath. There sat Great-Grandfather Frog on his big, green lily pad. He was blinking his great goggle eyes at jolly, round, red Mr. Sun.

"Oh, Grandfather Frog," said Danny Meadow Mouse in a very small voice, for you know he was quite out of

breath with running, "Oh, Grandfather Frog, I've brought you four fat, foolish, green flies."

Grandfather Frog put a hand behind an ear and listened. "Did I hear someone say 'foolish, green flies?'" asked Grandfather Frog.

"Yes, Grandfather Frog, here they are," said Danny Meadow Mouse, still in a very small voice. Then he gave Grandfather Frog the four fat, foolish, green flies.

"What is it that you want me to do for you, Danny Meadow Mouse?" asked Grandfather Frog as he smacked his lips, for he knew that Danny Meadow Mouse must want something to bring him four fat, foolish, green flies.

"If you please," said Danny Meadow Mouse, very politely, "if you please, Grandfather Frog, old Mr. Toad told me that you could tell me how Grandfather Meadow Mouse a thousand times removed lost half of his tail. Will you, Grandfather Frog—will you?"

"Chug-a-rum," said Grandfather Frog. "My cousin, Mr. Toad, talks too much."

But he settled himself comfortably on the big lily pad, and this is what he told Danny Meadow Mouse:

"Once upon a time, when the world was young, Mr. Meadow Mouse, your grandfather a thousand times removed, was a very fine gentleman. He took a great deal of pride in his appearance, did Mr. Meadow Mouse, and they used to say on the Green Meadows that he spent an hour, a full hour, every day combing his whiskers and brushing his coat.

"Anyway, he was very fine to look upon, was Mr. Meadow Mouse, and not the least attractive thing about him was his beautiful, long, slim tail, of which he was very proud.

"Now about this time there was a great deal of trouble on the Green Meadows and in the Green Forest, for some one was stealing—yes, stealing! Mr. Rabbit complained first. To be sure, Mr. Rabbit was lazy and his cabbage patch had grown little more than weeds while he had been minding other folks' affairs rather than his own, but, then, that was no reason why he should lose half of the little which he did raise. And that is just what he said had happened.

"No one really believed what Mr. Rabbit said, for he had such a bad name for telling things which were not so that when he did tell the truth no one could be quite sure of it.

"So no one paid much heed to what Mr. Rabbit said until Happy Jack Squirrel one day went to his snug little hollow in the big chestnut tree where he stores his nuts and discovered half had been stolen. Then Striped Chipmunk lost the greater part of his winter store of corn. A fat trout was stolen from Billy Mink.

"It was a terrible time, for every one suspected every one else, and no one on the Green Meadows was happy.

"One evening Mr. Meadow Mouse went for a stroll along the Crooked Little Path up the hill. It was dark, very dark indeed. But just as he passed Striped Chipmunk's granary, the place where he stores his supply of corn and acorns for the winter, Mr. Meadow Mouse met his cousin, Mr. Wharf Rat. Now Mr. Wharf Rat was very big and strong and Mr. Meadow Mouse had for a long time looked up to and admired him.

"'Good evening, Cousin Meadow Mouse,' said Mr. Wharf Rat, swinging a bag down from his shoulder. 'Will you do a favor for me?'

"Now Mr. Meadow Mouse felt very much flattered, and as he was a very obliging fellow anyway, he promptly said he would.

"'All right,' said Mr. Wharf Rat. 'I'm going to get you to tote this bag down the Crooked Little Path to the hollow chestnut tree. I've got an errand back on top of the hill.'

"So Mr. Meadow Mouse picked up the bag, which was very heavy, and swung it over his shoulder. Then he started down the Crooked Little Path. Half way down he met Striped Chipmunk.

"'Good evening, Mr. Meadow Mouse,' said Striped Chipmunk. 'What are you toting in the bag across your shoulder?'

"Now, of course, Mr. Meadow Mouse didn't know what was in the bag and he didn't like to admit that he was working for another, for he was very proud, was Mr. Meadow Mouse.

"So he said: 'Just a planting of potatoes I begged from Jimmy Skunk, just a planting of potatoes, Striped Chipmunk.'

"Now no one had ever suspected Mr. Meadow Mouse of stealing—no indeed! Striped Chipmunk would have gone his way and thought no more about it, had it not happened that there was a hole in the bag and from it something dropped at his feet. Striped Chipmunk picked it up and it wasn't a potato. It was a fat acorn. Striped Chipmunk said nothing but slipped it into his pocket.

"'Good night,' said Mr. Meadow Mouse, once more shouldering the bag.

"'Good night,' said Striped Chipmunk.

"No sooner had Mr. Meadow Mouse disappeared in the darkness down the Crooked Little Path than Striped

Chipmunk hurried to his granary. Some one had been there and stolen all his acorns!

"Then Striped Chipmunk ran to the house of his cousin, Happy Jack Squirrel, and told him how the acorns had been stolen from his granary and how he had met Mr. Meadow Mouse with a bag over his shoulder and how Mr. Meadow Mouse had said that he was toting home a planting of potatoes he had begged from Jimmy Skunk. 'And this,' said Striped Chipmunk, holding out the fat acorn, 'is what fell out of the bag.'

"Then Striped Chipmunk and Happy Jack Squirrel hurried over to Jimmy Skunk's house, and, just as they expected, they found that Mr. Meadow Mouse had not begged a planting of potatoes of Jimmy Skunk.

"So Striped Chipmunk and Happy Jack Squirrel and Jimmy Skunk hurried over to Mr. Rabbit's and told him all about Mr. Meadow Mouse and the bag of potatoes that dropped acorns. Mr. Rabbit looked very grave, very grave indeed. Then Striped Chipmunk and Happy Jack Squirrel and Jimmy Skunk and Mr. Rabbit started to tell Mr. Coon, who was cousin to old King Bear.

"On the way they met Hooty the Owl, and because he could fly softly and quickly, they sent Hooty the Owl to tell all the meadow people who were awake to come to the hollow chestnut tree. So Hooty the Owl flew away to tell all the little meadow people who were awake to meet at the hollow chestnut tree.

"When they reached the hollow chestnut tree whom should they find there but Mr. Meadow Mouse fast asleep beside the bag he had brought for Mr. Wharf Rat, who had wisely stayed away.

"Very softly Striped Chipmunk stole up and opened the bag. Out fell his store of fat acorns. Then they waked Mr. Meadow Mouse and marched him off to old Mother Nature, where they charged him with being a thief.

"Old Mother Nature listened to all they had to say. She saw the bag of acorns and she heard how Mr. Meadow Mouse had said that he had a planting of potatoes. Then she asked him if he had stolen the acorns. Yes, Sir, she asked him right out if he had stolen the acorns.

"Of course Mr. Meadow Mouse said that he had not stolen the acorns.

"'Then where did you get the bag of acorns?' asked old Mother Nature.

"When she asked this, Mr. Wharf Rat, who was sitting in the crowd of meadow people, got up and softly tiptoed away when he thought no one was looking. But old Mother Nature saw him. You can't fool old Mother Nature. No, Sir, you can't fool old Mother Nature, and it's of no use to try.

"Mr. Meadow Mouse didn't know what to say. He knew now that Mr. Wharf Rat must be the thief, but Mr. Wharf Rat was his cousin, and he had always looked up to him as a very fine gentleman. He couldn't tell the world that Mr. Wharf Rat was a thief. So Mr. Meadow Mouse said nothing.

"Three times old Mother Nature asked Mr. Meadow Mouse where he got the bag of acorns, and each time Mr. Meadow Mouse said nothing.

"'Mr. Meadow Mouse,' said old Mother Nature, and her voice was very stern, 'I know that you did not steal the acorns of Striped Chipmunk. I know that you did not even guess that there were stolen acorns in that bag. Everyone

else thinks that you are the thief who caused so much trouble on the Green Meadows and in the Green Forest. But I know who the real thief is and he is stealing away as fast as he can go down the Lone Little Path this very minute.'

"All of the little meadow people and forest folks turned to look down the Lone Little Path, but it was so dark none could see, none but Hooty the Owl, whose eyes are made to see in the dark.

"'I see him!' cried Hooty the Owl. 'It's Mr. Wharf Rat!'

"'Yes,' said old Mother Nature, 'it's Mr. Wharf Rat—he is the thief. And this shall be his punishment: Always hereafter he will be driven out wherever he is found. He shall no longer live in the Green Meadows or the Green Forest. Everyone will turn their backs upon him. He will live on what others throw away. He will live in filth and there will be no one to say a good word for him. He will become an outcast instead of a fine gentleman.'

"'And you, Mr. Meadow Mouse, in order that you may remember always to avoid bad company, and that while it is a splendid thing to be loyal to your friends and not to tell tales, it is also a very, very wrong thing to shield those who have done wrong when by so doing you simply help them to keep on doing wrong—you shall no longer have the splendid long tail of which you are so proud, but it shall be short and stubby.'

"Even while old Mother Nature was speaking, Mr. Meadow Mouse felt his tail grow shorter and shorter, and when she had finished he had just a little mean stub of a tail.

"Of course he felt terribly. And while Striped Chipmunk hurried to tell him how sorry he felt, and while

all the other little meadow people also hurried to tell him how sorry they felt, he could not be comforted. So he slipped away as quickly as he could, and because he was so ashamed he crept along underneath the long grass that no one should see his short tail. And ever since that long ago time when the world was young," concluded Grandfather Frog, "the Meadow Mice have had short tails and have always scurried along under cover of the long grass where no one will see them. And the Wharf Rats have never again lived in the Green Meadows or in the Green Forest, but have lived on filth and garbage around the homes of men, with every man's hand against them."

"Thank you, Grandfather Frog," said Danny Meadow Mouse, very soberly. "Now I understand why my tail is short and I shall not forget."

"But it isn't your fault at all, Danny Meadow Mouse," cried the Merry Little Breezes, who had been listening, "and we love you just as much as if your tail was long!"

Then they played tag with him all the way up the Lone Little Path to his house, till Danny Meadow Mouse quite forgot that he had wished that his tail was long.

CHAPTER II

WHY REDDY FOX HAS NO FRIENDS

The Green Meadows lay peaceful and still. Mother Moon, sailing high overhead, looked down upon them and smiled and smiled, flooding them with her silvery light. All day long the Merry Little Breezes of Old Mother West Wind had romped there among the asters and goldenrod. They had played tag through the cat rushes around the Smiling Pool. For very mischief they had rubbed the fur of the Field Mice babies the wrong way and had blown a fat green fly right out of Grandfather Frog's mouth just as his lips came together with a smack. Now they were safely tucked in bed behind the Purple Hills, and so they missed the midnight feast at the foot of the Lone Pine.

But Reddy Fox was there. You can always count on Reddy Fox to be about when mischief or good times are afoot, especially after Mr. Sun has pulled his nightcap on.

Jimmy Skunk was there. If there is any mischief Reddy Fox does not think of Jimmy Skunk will be sure to discover it.

Billy Mink was there. Yes indeed, Billy Mink was there! Billy Mink is another mischief maker. When Reddy Fox and Jimmy Skunk are playing pranks or in trouble of any kind you are certain to find Billy Mink close by. That is, you are certain to find him if you look sharp enough. But

Billy Mink is so slim, he moves so quickly, and his wits are so sharp, that he is not seen half so often as the others.

With Billy Mink came his cousin, Shadow the Weasel, who is sly and cruel. No one likes Shadow the Weasel.

Little Joe Otter and Jerry Muskrat came. They were late, for the legs of Little Joe Otter are so short that he is a slow traveler on land, while Jerry Muskrat feels much more at home in the water than on the dry ground.

Of course Peter Rabbit was there. Without him no party on the Green Meadows would be complete, and Peter likes to be abroad at night even better than by day. With Peter came his cousin, Jumper the Hare, who had come down from the Pine Forest for a visit.

Boomer the Nighthawk and Hooty the Owl completed the party, though Hooty had not been invited and no one knew that he was there.

Each was to contribute something to the feast—the thing that he liked best. Such an array as Mother Moon looked down upon! Reddy Fox had brought a plump, tender chicken, stolen from Farmer Brown's dooryard.

Very quietly, like a thin, brown shadow, Billy Mink had slipped up to the duck pond and—alas! Now Mother Quack had one less in her pretty little flock than when as jolly, round, red Mr. Sun went to bed behind the Purple Hills, she had counted her babies as they tucked their heads under their wings.

Little Joe Otter had been fishing and he brought a great fat brother of the lamented Tommy Trout, who didn't mind.

Jerry Muskrat brought up from the mud of the river bottom some fine fresh water clams, of which he is very fond.

Jimmy Skunk stole three big eggs from the nest of old Gray Goose.

Peter Rabbit and Jumper the Hare rolled up a great, tender, fresh cabbage.

Boomer the Nighthawk said that he was very sorry, but he was on a diet of insects, which he must swallow one at a time, so to save trouble he had swallowed them as he caught them.

Now Hooty the Owl is a glutton and is lazy. "Reddy Fox and Jimmy Skunk and Billy Mink are sure to bring something I like, so what is the use of spending my time hunting for what someone else will get for me?" said he to himself. So Hooty the Owl went very early to the Lone Pine and hid among the thick branches where no one could see him.

Shadow the Weasel is sly and a thief and lives by his wits. So because he had rather steal than be honest, he too went to the midnight spread with nothing but his appetite.

Now Reddy Fox is also a glutton and very, very crafty. When he saw the plump duck brought by Billy Mink, his mouth watered, for Reddy Fox is very, very fond of young spring ducks. So straightway he began to plan how he could get possession of Billy Mink's duck.

And when Billy Mink saw the fat trout Little Joe Otter had brought, his eyes danced and his heart swelled with envy, for Billy Mink is very, very fond of fish. At once he began to plan how he could secure that particular fat trout Little Joe Otter guarded so carefully.

Jimmy Skunk was quite contented with the eggs he had stolen from old Gray Goose—that is, he was until he saw the plump chicken Reddy Fox had brought from Farmer Brown's dooryard. Then suddenly his stomach became

very empty, very empty indeed for chicken, and Jimmy Skunk began to think of a way to add the chicken of Reddy Fox to his own stolen eggs.

Because Reddy Fox is the largest he was given the place of honor at the head of the table under the Lone Pine. On his right sat Little Joe Otter and on his left Jerry Muskrat. Shadow the Weasel was next to Little Joe Otter, while right across from him was Jimmy Skunk. Peter Rabbit was next, sitting opposite his cousin, Jumper the Hare. At the extreme end, facing Reddy Fox, sat Billy Mink, with the plump duck right under his sharp little nose.

Boomer the Nighthawk excused himself on the plea that he needed exercise to aid digestion, and as he had brought nothing to the feast, his excuse was politely accepted.

Reddy Fox is very, very cunning, and his crafty brain had been busily working out a plan to get all these good things for himself. "Little brothers of the Green Meadows," began Reddy Fox, "we have met here to-night for a feast of brotherly love."

Reddy Fox paused a moment to look hungrily at Billy Mink's duck. Billy Mink cast a longing eye at Little Joe Otter's trout, while Jimmy Skunk stole an envious glance at Reddy Fox's chicken.

"But there is one missing to make our joy complete," continued Reddy Fox. "Who has seen Bobby Coon?"

No one had seen Bobby Coon. Somehow happy-go-lucky Bobby Coon had been overlooked when the invitations were sent out.

"I move," continued Reddy Fox, "that because Billy Mink runs swiftly, and because he knows where Bobby

Coon usually is to be found, he be appointed a committee of one to find Bobby Coon and bring him to the feast."

Now nothing could have been less to the liking of Billy Mink, but there was nothing for him to do but to yield as gracefully as he could and go in search of Bobby Coon.

No sooner had Billy Mink disappeared down the Lone Little Path than Reddy Fox recalled a nest of grouse eggs he had seen that day under a big hemlock, and he proposed that inasmuch as Jimmy Skunk already wore stripes for having stolen a nest of eggs from Mrs. Grouse, he was just the one to go steal these eggs and bring them to the feast.

Of course there was nothing for Jimmy Skunk to do but to yield as gracefully as he could and go in search of the nest of eggs under the big hemlock.

No sooner had Jimmy Skunk started off than Reddy Fox remembered a big shining sucker Farmer Brown's boy had caught that afternoon and tossed among the rushes beside the Smiling Pool. Little Joe Otter listened and his mouth watered and watered until he could sit still no longer. "If you please," said Little Joe Otter, "I'll run down to the Smiling Pool and get that sucker to add to the feast."

No sooner was Little Joe Otter out of sight than Reddy Fox was reminded of a field of carrots on the other side of the Green Meadows. Now Peter Rabbit and Jumper the Hare are very fond of tender young carrots and they volunteered to bring a supply for the feast. So away they hurried with big jumps down the Lone Little Path and out across the Green Meadows.

No sooner were Peter Rabbit and Jumper the Hare fairly started than Reddy Fox began to tell of some luscious sweet apples he had noticed under a wild apple tree a little

way back on the hill. Now Jerry Muskrat is quite as fond of luscious sweet apples as of fresh-water clams, so quietly slipping away, he set out in quest of the wild apple tree a little way back on the hill.

No sooner was Jerry Muskrat lost in the black shadows than Reddy Fox turned to speak to Shadow the Weasel. But Shadow the Weasel believes that a feast in the stomach is worth two banquets untasted, so while the others had been talking, he had quietly sucked dry the three big eggs stolen by Jimmy Skunk from old Gray Goose, and then because he is so slim and so quick and so sly, he slipped away without anyone seeing him.

So when Reddy Fox turned to speak to Shadow the Weasel, he found himself alone. At least he thought himself alone, and he smiled a wicked, selfish smile as he walked over to Billy Mink's duck. He was thinking how smart he had been to get rid of all the others, and of how he would enjoy the feast all by himself.

As Reddy Fox stooped to pick up Billy Mink's duck, a great shadow dropped softly, oh so softly, out of the Lone Pine down onto the plump chicken. Then without the teeniest, weeniest bit of noise, it floated back into the Lone Pine and with it went the plump chicken.

Reddy Fox, still with his wicked, selfish smile, trotted back with Billy Mink's duck, but he dropped it in sheer surprise when he discovered that his plump chicken had disappeared. Now Reddy Fox is very suspicious, as people who are not honest themselves are very apt to be. So he left Billy Mink's duck where he had dropped it and trotted very, very softly up the Lone Little Path to try to catch the thief who had stolen his plump chicken.

No sooner was his back turned than down out of the Lone Pine floated the great shadow, and when a minute later Reddy Fox returned, Billy Mink's duck had also disappeared.

Reddy Fox could hardly believe his eyes. He didn't smile now. He was too angry and too frightened. Yes, Reddy Fox was frightened. He walked in a big circle round and round the place where the plump chicken and the duck had been, and the more he walked, the more suspicious he became. He wrinkled and wrinkled his little black nose in an effort to smell the intruder, but not a whiff could he get. All was as still and peaceful as could be. Little Joe Otter's trout lay shining in the moonlight. The big head of cabbage lay just where Peter Rabbit and Jumper the Hare had left it. Reddy Fox rubbed his eyes to make sure that he was not dreaming and that the plump chicken and the duck were not there too.

Just then Bowser the Hound, over at Farmer Brown's, bayed at the moon. Reddy Fox always is nervous and by this time he was so fidgety that he couldn't stand still. When Bowser the Hound bayed at the moon Reddy Fox jumped a foot off the ground and whirled about in the direction of Farmer Brown's house. Then he remembered that Bowser the Hound is always chained up at night, so that he had nothing to fear from him.

After listening and looking a moment Reddy Fox decided that all was safe. "Well," said he to himself, "I'll have that fat trout anyway," and turned to get it.

But the fat trout he had seen a minute before shining in the moonlight had also disappeared. Reddy Fox looked and looked until his eyes nearly popped out of his head.

Then he did what all cowards do—ran home as fast as his legs could carry him.

Now of course Billy Mink didn't find Bobby Coon, and when he came back up the Lone Little Path he was very tired, very hungry and very cross. And of course Jimmy Skunk failed to find the nest of Mrs. Grouse, and Little Joe Otter could find no trace of the shining big sucker among the rushes beside the Smiling Pool. They also were very tired, very hungry and very cross.

When the three returned to the Lone Pine and found nothing there but the big head of cabbage, which none of them liked, the empty egg shells of old Gray Goose and Jerry Muskrat's clams, they straightway fell to accusing each other of having stolen the duck and the fat trout and the eggs and began to quarrel dreadfully.

Pretty soon up came Peter Rabbit and Jumper the Hare, who had failed to find the tender young carrots. And up came Jerry Muskrat, who had found no luscious sweet apples.

"Where is Reddy Fox?" asked Peter Rabbit.

Sure enough, where was Reddy Fox? Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter and Jimmy Skunk stopped quarreling and looked at each other.

"Reddy Fox is the thief!" they cried all together.

Peter Rabbit and Jumper the Hare and Jerry Muskrat agreed that Reddy Fox must be the thief, and had sent them all away on false errands that he might have the feast all to himself.

So because there was nothing else to do, Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter, tired and hungry and angry, started for their homes beside the Laughing Brook. And Jimmy

Skunk, also tired and hungry and angry, started off up the Crooked Little Path to look for some beetles.

But Peter Rabbit and Jumper the Hare sat down to enjoy the big head of cabbage, while close beside them sat Jerry Muskrat smacking his lips over his clams, they tasted so good. Mother Moon looked down and smiled and smiled, for she knew that each had a clear conscience, for they had done no harm to anyone.

And up in the thick top of the great pine Hooty the Owl nodded sleepily, for his stomach was very full of chicken and duck and trout, although he had not been invited to the party.

And this is why Reddy Fox has no true friends on the Green Meadows.

CHAPTER III

WHY PETER RABBIT'S EARS ARE LONG

The Merry Little Breezes of Old Mother West Wind were tired. Ever since she had turned them out of her big bag onto the Green Meadows early that morning they had romped and played tag and chased butterflies while Old Mother West Wind herself went to hunt for a raincloud which had wandered away before it had watered the thirsty little plants who were bravely trying to keep the Green Meadows lovely and truly green. Jolly, round, red Mr. Sun wore his broadest smile and the more he smiled the warmer it grew. Mr. Sun is never thirsty himself, never the least little bit, or perhaps he would have helped Old Mother West Wind find the wandering raincloud.

The Merry Little Breezes threw themselves down on the edge of the Smiling Pool, where the rushes grow tall, and there they took turns rocking the cradle which held Mrs. Redwing's four babies.

Pretty soon one of the Merry Little Breezes, peeping through the rushes, spied Peter Rabbit sitting up very straight on the edge of the Green Meadows. His long ears were pointed straight up, his big eyes were very wide open and he seemed to be looking and listening with a great deal of curiosity.

"I wonder why it is that Peter Rabbit has such long ears," said the Merry Little Breeze.

"Chug-a-rum!" replied a great, deep voice right behind him.

All the Merry Little Breezes jumped up and ran through the rushes to the very edge of the Smiling Pool. There on a great green lily pad sat Great-Grandfather Frog, his hands folded across his white and yellow waistcoat and his green coat shining spick and span.

"Chug-a-rum," said Grandfather Frog.

"Oh, Grandfather Frog," cried the Merry Little Breezes all together, "do tell us why it is that Peter Rabbit has such long ears."

Grandfather Frog cleared his throat. He looked to the east and cleared his throat again. Then he looked to the west, and cleared his throat. He looked north and he looked south, and each time he cleared his throat, but said nothing. Finally he folded his hands once more over his white and yellow waistcoat, and looking straight up at jolly, round, red Mr. Sun he remarked in his very deepest Voice and to no one in particular:

"If I had four fat, foolish, green flies, it is just possible that I might remember how it happens that Peter Rabbit has such long ears."

Then up jumped all the Merry Little Breezes and away they raced. Some of them went east, some of them went west, some of them went north, some of them went south, all looking for fat, foolish, green flies for Grandfather Frog.

By and by they came skipping back, one by one, to the edge of the Smiling Pool, each with a fat, foolish, green fly, and each stopping to give Mrs. Redwing's cradle a gentle push.

When Grandfather Frog had swallowed all the fat, foolish, green flies brought by the Merry Little Breezes, he



Mr. Rabbit had a great deal of curiosity,
a very great deal, indeed.

settled himself comfortably on his big lily pad once more and began:

"Once upon a time, very long ago, when the world was young, Mr. Rabbit—not our Peter Rabbit, but his grandfather a thousand times removed—had short ears like all the other meadow people, and also his four legs were all of the same length, just exactly the same length.

"Now Mr. Rabbit had a great deal of curiosity, a very great deal, indeed. He was forever pushing his prying little nose into other people's affairs, which, you know, is a most unpleasant habit. In fact, Mr. Rabbit had become a nuisance.

"Whenever Billy Mink stopped to pass the time of day with Jerry Muskrat they were sure to find Mr. Rabbit standing close by, listening to all they said. If Johnny Chuck's mother ran over to have a few minutes' chat with Jimmy Skunk's mother, the first thing they knew Mr. Rabbit would be squatting down in the grass right behind them.

"The older he grew the worse Mr. Rabbit became. He would spend his evenings going from house to house, tiptoeing softly up to the windows to listen to what the folks inside were saying. And the more he heard the more Mr. Rabbit's curiosity grew.

"Now, like most people who meddle in other folks' affairs, Mr. Rabbit had no time to tend to his own business. His cabbage patch grew up to weeds. His house leaked, his fences fell to pieces, and altogether his was the worst looking place on the Green Meadows.

"Worse still, Mr. Rabbit was a trouble maker. He just couldn't keep his tongue still. And like most gossips, he never could tell the exact truth.

"Dear me! dear me!" said Grandfather Frog, shaking his head solemnly. "Things had come to a dreadful pass on the Green Meadows. Reddy Fox and Bobby Coon never met without fighting. Jimmy Skunk and Johnny Chuck turned their backs on each other. Jerry Muskrat, Little Joe Otter, and Billy Mink called each other bad names. All

because Mr. Rabbit had told so many stories that were not true.

"Now when old Mother Nature visited the Green Meadows she soon saw what a dreadful state all the meadow people were in, and she began to inquire how it all came about.

"'It's all because of Mr. Rabbit,' said Reddy Fox.

"'No one is to blame but Mr. Rabbit,' said Striped Chipmunk.

"Everywhere old Mother Nature inquired it was the same—Mr. Rabbit, Mr. Rabbit, Mr. Rabbit.

"So then old Mother Nature sent for blustering great Mr. North Wind, who is very strong. And she sent for Mr. Rabbit.

"Mr. Rabbit trembled in his shoes when he got old Mother Nature's message. He would have liked to run away and hide. But he did not dare do that, for he knew that there was nowhere he could hide that Mother Nature would not find him sooner or later. And besides, his curiosity would give him no peace. He just had to know what old Mother Nature wanted.

"So Peter Rabbit put on his best suit, which was very shabby, and set out for the Lone Pine to see what old Mother Nature wanted. When he got there, he found all the little people of the Green Meadows and all the little folks of the Green Forest there before him. There were Reddy Fox, Johnny Chuck, Striped Chipmunk, Happy Jack Squirrel, Mr. Black Snake, old Mr. Crow, Sammy Jay, Billy Mink, Little Joe Otter, Jerry Muskrat, Spotty the Turtle, old King Bear, his cousin, Mr. Coon, and all the other little people.

"When he saw all who had gathered under the Lone Pine, and how they all looked crossly at him, Mr. Rabbit was so frightened that his heart went pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat, and he wanted more than ever to run away. But he didn't dare to. No, Sir, he didn't dare to. And then he was so curious to know what it all meant that he wouldn't have run if he had dared.

"Old Mother Nature made Mr. Rabbit sit up on an old log where all could see him. Then in turn she asked each present who was the cause of all the trouble on the Green Meadows. And each in turn answered 'Mr. Rabbit.'

"'Mr. Rabbit,' said old Mother Nature, 'you are lazy, for your cabbage patch has all gone to weeds. You are shiftless, for your house leaks. You are a sneak, for you creep up where you are not wanted and listen to things which do not concern you. You are a thief, for you steal the secrets of others. You are a prevaricator, for you tell things which are not so. Mr. Rabbit, you are all these—a lazy, shiftless sneak, thief and prevaricator.'

"It was dreadful. Mother Nature paused, and Mr. Rabbit felt oh so ashamed. He did not look up, but he felt, he just felt, all the eyes of all the little meadow people and forest folk burning right into him. So he hung his head and two great tears fell splash, right at his feet. You see Mr. Rabbit wasn't altogether bad. It was just this dreadful curiosity.

"Old Mother Nature knew this and down in her heart she loved Mr. Rabbit and was oh so sorry for him.

"'Mr. Rabbit,' continued old Mother Nature, 'because your curiosity is so great, your ears shall be made long, that every one who sees you may know that it is not safe to talk when you are near. Because you are a sneak and steal up

to people unseen, your-hind legs shall be made long, so that whenever you sit up straight you will be tall and every one can see you, and whenever you run, you will go with great jumps, and every one will know who it is running away. And because you are shiftless and your house leaks, you will hereafter live in a hole in the ground.'

"Then old Mother Nature took Mr. Rabbit by his two ears and big, strong Mr. North Wind took Peter Rabbit by his hind legs, and they both pulled. And when they put him down Peter Rabbit's ears and his hind legs were long, many times longer than they used to be. When he tried to run away to hide his shame, he found that the only way he could go was with great jumps, and you may be sure he jumped as fast as he could.

"And ever since that long ago time, when the world was young, rabbits have had long ears and long hind legs, all because of the curiosity of their grandfather a thousand times removed. And now you know why Peter Rabbit's ears are long, and why he is always sitting up and listening," concluded Great-Grandfather Frog.

"Thank you, thank you, Grandfather Frog!" shouted all the Merry Little Breezes, and raced away to help old Mother West Wind drive up the wandering raincloud, which she had found at last.

CHAPTER IV

REDDY FOX DISOBEYS

On the brow of the hill by the Lone Pine sat Reddy Fox. Every few moments he pointed his little black nose up at the round, yellow moon and barked. Way over across the broad White Meadows, which in summer time are green, you know, in the dooryard of Farmer Brown's house, Bowser the Hound sat and barked at the moon, too.

"Yap-yap-yap," barked Reddy Fox, as loud as he could.

"Bow-wow-wow," said Bowser the Hound in his deepest voice.

Then both would listen and watch the million little stars twinkle and twinkle in the frosty sky. Now just why Reddy Fox should bark at the moon he did not know. He just had to. Every night for a week he had sat at the foot of the Lone Pine and barked and barked until his throat was sore. Every night old Mother Fox had warned him that noisy children would come to no good end, and every night Reddy had promised that he would bark no more. But every night when the first silver flood of witching light crept over the hill and cast strange shadows from the naked branches of the trees, Reddy forgot all about his promise. Deep down under his little red coat was a strange feeling which he could not explain. He simply must bark, so up to the Lone Pine he would go and yap and yap and yap, until

all the little meadow people who were not asleep knew just where Reddy Fox was.

Bowser the Hound knew, too, and he made up his mind that Reddy Fox was making fun of him. Now Bowser did not like to be made fun of any more than little boys and girls do, and he made up his mind that if ever he could break his chain, or that if ever Farmer Brown forgot to chain him up, he would teach Reddy Fox a lesson that Reddy would never forget.

"Yap-yap-yap," barked Reddy Fox, and then listened to hear Bowser's deep voice reply. But this time there was no reply. Reddy listened, and listened, and then tried it again. Way off on a distant hill he could hear Hooty the Owl. Close by him Jack Frost was busy snapping sticks. Down on the White Meadows he could see Jimmy Skunk prowling about. Once he heard a rooster crow sleepily in Farmer Brown's hen-house, but he thought of Bowser the Hound, and though his mouth watered, he did not dare risk a closer acquaintance with the big dog. So he sat still and barked, and pretty soon he forgot all else but the moon and the sound of his own voice.

Now Bowser the Hound had managed to slip his collar. "Aha," thought Bowser, "now I'll teach Reddy Fox to make fun of me," and like a shadow he slipped through the fence and across the White Meadows towards the Lone Pine.

Reddy Fox had just barked for the hundreth time when he heard a twig crack just back of him. It had a different sound from the noisy crack of Jack Frost, and Reddy stopped a yap right in the middle and whirled about to see what it might be. There was Bowser the Hound

almost upon him, his eyes flashing fire, his great, red jaws wide open, and every hair on his back bristling with rage.

Reddy Fox didn't wait to say "Good evening," or to see more. Oh, no! He turned a back somersault and away he sped over the hard, snowy crust as fast as his legs could carry him. Bowser baying at the moon he liked to hear, but Bowser baying at his heels was another matter, and Reddy ran as he had never run before. Down across the White Meadows he sped, Bowser frightening all the echoes with the roar of his big voice as he followed in full cry.

How Reddy did wish that he had minded Mother Fox! How safe and snug and warm was his home under the roots of the old hickory tree, and how he did wish that he was safely there! But it would never do to go there now, for that would tell Bowser where he lived, and Bowser would take Farmer Brown there, and that would be the end of Reddy Fox and of Mother Fox and of all the brother and sister foxes.

So Reddy twisted and turned, and ran this way and ran that way, and the longer he ran, the shorter his breath grew. It was coming in great pants now. His bushy tail, of which he was so proud, had become very heavy. How Reddy Fox did wish and wish that he had minded Mother Fox! He twisted and turned, and doubled this way and that way, and all the time Bowser the Hound got closer and closer.

Now way off on the hill behind the White Meadows Mother Fox had been hunting for her supper. She had heard the "Yap-yap-yap" of Reddy Fox as he barked at the moon, and she had heard Bowser baying over in the barnyard of Farmer Brown. Then she had heard the "yap" of Reddy Fox cut short in the middle and the roar of

Bowser's big voice as he started to chase Reddy Fox. She knew that Reddy could run fast, but she also knew that Bowser the Hound had a wonderful nose, and that Bowser would never give up. So Mother Fox pattered down the Crooked Little Path onto the White Meadows, where she could see the chase. When she got near enough, she barked twice to tell Reddy that she would help him.

Now Reddy Fox was so tired that he was almost in despair when he heard Mother Fox bark. But he knew that Mother Fox was so wise, and she had so often fooled Bowser the Hound, that if he could hold out just a little longer she would help him. So for a few minutes he ran faster than ever and he gained a long way on Bowser the Hound. As he passed a shock of corn that had been left standing on the White Meadows, Mother Fox stepped out from behind it. "Go home, Reddy Fox," said she, sharply, "go home and stay there until I come." Then she deliberately sat down in front of the shock of corn to wait until Bowser the Hound should come in sight.

Now Bowser the Hound kept his eyes and nose on the track of Reddy Fox, looking up only once in a while to see where he was going, so he did not see Reddy Fox slip behind the corn shock, and when he did look up, he saw only Mother Fox sitting there waiting for him.

Now Bowser the Hound thinks slowly. When he saw old Mother Fox sitting there, he did not stop to think that it was not Reddy Fox whom he had been following, or he would have known better than to waste his time following old Mother Fox. He would have just hunted around until he had found where Reddy had gone to. But Bowser the Hound thinks slowly. When he saw old Mother Fox sitting

there, he thought it was Reddy Fox and that now he had him.

With a great roar of his big voice, he sprang forward. Mother Fox waited until he was almost upon her, then springing to one side, she trotted off a little way. At once Bowser the Hound started after her. She pretended to be very tired. Every time he rushed forward she managed to just slip out of his grasp.

Little by little she led him across the White Meadows back towards Farmer Brown's barnyard. Pretty soon old Mother Fox began to run as fast as she could, and that is very fast indeed. She left Bowser the Hound a long, long way behind. When she came to a stone wall she jumped up on the stone wall and ran along it, just like a squirrel. Every once in a while she would make a long jump and then trot along a little way again. She knew that stones do not carry the scent well, and that Bowser the Hound would have hard work to smell her on the stone wall. Way down at the end of the pasture an old apple tree stretched a long limb out towards the stone wall. When she got opposite to this she jumped onto this long limb and ran up into the tree. There in the crotch, close to the trunk, she sat and watched.

Bowser the Hound, making a tremendous noise, followed her trail up to the stone wall. Then he was puzzled. He sniffed this way, and he sniffed that way, but he could not tell where Mother Fox had disappeared to. He looked up at old Mother Moon and bayed and bayed, but old Mother Moon did not help him a bit. Then he jumped over the stone wall and looked, and looked, and smelled, and smelled, but no track of Mother Fox could he find. Then he ran up along the stone wall a little way, and

then down along the stone wall a little way, but still he could not find a track of Mother Fox. The longer he hunted, the angrier he grew.

Old Mother Fox, sitting in the apple tree, watched him and laughed and laughed to herself. Then when she grew tired of watching him, she made a long jump out into the field and trotted off home to punish Reddy Fox for his disobedience. When she got there she found Reddy Fox very much ashamed, very tired and very sorrowful, and since that time Reddy Fox has never barked at the moon.

CHAPTER V

STRIPED CHIPMUNK'S POCKETS

It was one of Striped Chipmunk's busy days. Every day is a busy day with Striped Chipmunk at this season of the year, for the sweet acorns are ripe and the hickory nuts rattle down whenever Old Mother West Wind shakes the trees, while every night Jack Frost opens chestnut burrs just to see the squirrels scamper for the plump brown nuts the next morning.

So Striped Chipmunk was very busy, very busy indeed! He whisked in and out of the old stone wall along one edge of the Green Meadows. Back and forth, back and forth, sometimes to the old hickory tree, sometimes to the hollow chestnut tree, sometimes to the great oak on the edge of the Green Forest Striped Chipmunk scampered.

Old Mother West Wind, coming down from the Purple Hills very early in the morning, had found Striped Chipmunk up before her and hard at work. Later, when jolly, round, red Mr. Sun had climbed up into the sky, the Merry Little Breezes had spied Striped Chipmunk whisking along the old stone wall and had raced over to play with him, for the Merry Little Breezes are very fond of Striped Chipmunk. They got there just in time to see him disappear under a great stone in the old wall. In a minute he was out again and off as fast as he could go to the old hickory tree.

"Oh, Striped Chipmunk, come play with us," shouted the Merry Little Breezes, running after him.

But Striped Chipmunk just flirted his funny little tail and winked with both his bright eyes at them.

"Busy! busy! busy!" said Striped Chipmunk, hurrying along as fast as his short legs could take him.

The Merry Little Breezes laughed, and one of them, dancing ahead, pulled the funny little tail of Striped Chipmunk.

"It's a beautiful day; do come and play with us," cried the Merry Little Breeze.

But Striped Chipmunk flirted his tail over his back once more.

"Busy! busy! busy!" he shouted over his shoulder and ran faster than ever.

In a few minutes he was back again, but such a queer-looking fellow as he was! His head was twice as big as it had been before and you would hardly have known that it was Striped Chipmunk but for the saucy way he twitched his funny little tail and the spry way he scampered along the old stone wall.

"Oh, Striped Chipmunk's got the mumps!" shouted the Merry Little Breezes.

But Striped Chipmunk said never a word. He couldn't. He ran faster than ever until he disappeared under the big stone. When he popped his head out again he was just his usual saucy little self.

"Say, Striped Chipmunk," cried the Merry Little Breezes, rushing over to him, "tell us how you happen to have pockets in your cheeks."

But Striped Chipmunk just snapped his bright eyes at them and said "Busy! busy! busy!" as he scuttled over to the hollow chestnut tree.

The Merry Little Breezes saw that it was no use at all to try to tempt Striped Chipmunk to play with them or to answer questions.

"I tell you what," cried one, "let's go ask Great-Grandfather Frog how Striped Chipmunk happens to have pockets in his cheeks. He'll know."

So away they started, after they had raced over to the big hollow chestnut tree and sent a shower of brown nuts rattling down to Striped Chipmunk from the burrs that Jack Frost had opened the night before.

"Good-bye, Striped Chipmunk," they shouted as they romped across the Green Meadows. And Striped Chipmunk stopped long enough to shout "Good-bye" before he filled his pockets with the brown nuts.

Old Grandfather Frog sat on his big green lily pad blinking in the sun. It was very still, very, very still indeed. Suddenly out of the brown bulrushes burst the Merry Little Breezes and surrounded old Grandfather Frog. And every one of them had brought to him a fat, foolish, green fly.

Grandfather's big goggly eyes sparkled and he gave a funny little hop up into the air as he caught each foolish green fly. When the last one was safely inside his white and yellow waistcoat he settled himself comfortably on the big green lily pad and folded his hands over the foolish green flies.

"Chug-a-rum!" said Grandfather Frog. "What is it you want this morning?"

"Oh, Grandfather Frog," cried the Merry Little Breezes, "tell us how it happens that Striped Chipmunk has pockets in his cheeks. Do tell us, Grandfather Frog. Please do!"

"Chug-a-rum," said Grandfather Frog. "How should I know?"

"But you do know, Grandfather Frog, you know you do. Please tell us!" cried the Merry Little Breezes as they settled themselves among the rushes.

And presently Grandfather Frog began:

"Once upon a time—a long, long while ago—"

"When the world was young?" asked a mischievous little Breeze.

Grandfather Frog pretended to be very much put out by the interruption, and tried to look very severe. But the Merry Little Breezes were all giggling, so that presently he had to smile too.

"Yes," said he, "it was when the world was young, before old King Bear became king. Mr. Chipmunk, Striped Chipmunk's great-great-great-grandfather a thousand times removed, was the smallest of the squirrels, just as Striped Chipmunk is now. But he didn't mind that, not the least little bit. Mr. Gray Squirrel was four times as big and had a handsome tail, Mr. Fox Squirrel was four times as big and he also had a handsome tail, Mr. Red Squirrel was twice as big and he thought his tail was very good to see. But Mr. Chipmunk didn't envy his big cousins their fine tails; not he! You see he had himself a beautiful striped coat of which he was very proud and which he thought much more to be desired than a big tail.

"So Mr. Chipmunk went his way happy and contented and he was such a merry little fellow and so full of fun and

cut such funny capers that everybody loved Mr. Chipmunk.

"One day, when the nights were cool and all the trees had put on their brilliant colors, old Mother Nature sent word down across the Green Meadows that every squirrel should gather for her and store away until she came a thousand nuts. Now the squirrels had grown fat and lazy through the long summer, all but Mr. Chipmunk, who frisked about so much that he had no chance to grow fat.

"Mr. Gray Squirrel grumbled. Mr. Fox Squirrel grumbled. Mr. Red Squirrel grumbled. But they didn't dare disobey old Mother Nature, so they all set out, each to gather a thousand nuts. And Mr. Chipmunk alone was pleasant and cheerful.

"When they reached the nut trees, what do you suppose they discovered? Why, that they had been so greedy that they had eaten most of the nuts and it was going to be hard work to find and store a thousand nuts for old Mother Nature. Then they began to hurry, did Mr. Gray Squirrel and Mr. Fox Squirrel and Mr. Red Squirrel, each trying to make sure of his thousand nuts. They quarreled and they fought over the nuts on the ground and even up in the trees. And because they were so big and so strong, they pushed Mr. Chipmunk this way and they pushed him that way and often just as he was going to pick up a fat nut one of them would knock him over and make off with the prize.

"Poor Mr. Chipmunk kept his temper and was as polite as ever, but how he did work! His cousins are great climbers and could get the nuts still left on the trees, but Mr. Chipmunk is a poor climber, so he had to be content with those on the ground. Of course he could carry only

one nut at a time and his legs were so short that he had to run as fast as ever he could to store each nut in his secret store-house and get back for another. And while the others quarreled and fought, he hurried back and forth, back and forth, from early morning until jolly, round, red Mr. Sun pulled his night cap on behind the Purple Hills, hunting for nuts and putting them away in his secret store-house.

"But the nuts grew scarcer and scarcer on the ground and harder to find, for the other squirrels were picking them up too, and then they did not have so far to carry them.

"Sometimes one of his cousins up in the trees would drop a nut, but Mr. Chipmunk never would take it, not even when he was having hard work to find any, 'for,' said he to himself, 'if my cousin drops a nut, it is his nut just the same.'

"Finally Mr. Gray Squirrel announced that he had got his thousand nuts. Then Mr. Fox Squirrel announced that he had got his thousand nuts. The next day Mr. Red Squirrel stopped hunting because he had his thousand nuts.

"But Mr. Chipmunk had hardly more than half as many. And that night he made a dreadful discovery—some one had found his secret store-house and had stolen some of his precious nuts.

"'It's of no use to cry over what can't be helped,' said Mr. Chipmunk, and the next morning he bravely started out again. He had worked so hard that he had grown thinner and thinner until now he was only a shadow of his old self. But he was as cheerful as ever and kept right on hunting and hunting for stray nuts. Mr. Gray Squirrel and Mr. Fox Squirrel and Mr. Red Squirrel sat around and

rested and made fun of him. Way up in the tops of the tallest trees a few nuts still clung, but his cousins did not once offer to go up and shake them down for Mr. Chipmunk.

"And then old Mother Nature came down across the Green Meadows. First Mr. Gray Squirrel took her to his storehouse and she counted his thousand nuts. Then Mr. Fox Squirrel led her to his storehouse and she counted his thousand nuts. Then Mr. Red Squirrel showed her his store-house and she counted his thousand nuts.

"Last of all Mr. Chipmunk led her to his secret store-house and showed her the pile of nuts he had worked so hard to get. Old Mother Nature didn't need to count them to see that there were not a thousand there.

"'I've done the best I could,' said Mr. Chipmunk bravely, and he trembled all over, he was so tired.

"Old Mother Nature said never a word but went out on the Green Meadows and sent the Merry Little Breezes to call together all the little meadow people and all the little forest folks. When they had all gathered before her she suddenly turned to Mr. Gray Squirrel.

"'Go bring me a hundred nuts from your store-house,' said she.

"Then she turned to Mr. Fox Squirrel.

"'Go bring me a hundred nuts from your store-house,' said she.

"Last of all she called Mr. Red Squirrel out where all could see him. Mr. Red Squirrel crept out very slowly. His teeth chattered and his tail, of which he was so proud, dragged on the ground, for you see Mr. Red Squirrel had something on his mind.

"Then old Mother Nature told how she had ordered each squirrel to get and store for her a thousand nuts. She told just how selfish Mr. Gray Squirrel and Mr. Fox Squirrel had been. She told just how hard Mr. Chipmunk had worked and then she told how part of his precious store had been stolen.

"'And there,' said old Mother Nature in a loud voice so that every one should hear, 'there is the thief!'

"Then she commanded Mr. Red Squirrel to go to his store-house and bring her half of the biggest and best nuts he had there!

"Mr. Red Squirrel sneaked off with his head hanging, and began to bring the nuts. And as he tramped back and forth, back and forth, all the little meadow people and all the little forest folks pointed their fingers at him and cried 'Thief! Thief! Thief!'

"When all the nuts had been brought to her by Mr. Gray Squirrel and Mr. Fox Squirrel and Mr. Red Squirrel, old Mother Nature gathered them all up and put them in the secret store-house of Mr. Chipmunk. Then she set Mr. Chipmunk up on an old stump where all could see him and she said:

"'Mr. Chipmunk, because you have been faithful, because you have been cheerful, because you have done your best, henceforth you shall have two pockets, one in each cheek, so that you can carry two nuts at once, that you may not have to work so hard the next time I tell you to store a thousand nuts.'

"And all the little meadow people and all the little forest folks shouted 'Hurrah for Mr. Chipmunk!' All but his cousins, Mr. Gray Squirrel and Mr. Fox Squirrel and Mr. Red Squirrel, who hid themselves for shame.

"And ever since that time long ago, when the world was young, the Chipmunks have had pockets in their cheeks.

"You can't fool old Mother Nature," concluded Great-Grandfather Frog. "No, Sir, you can't fool old Mother Nature and it's no use to try."

"Thank you, thank you," cried the Merry Little Breezes, clapping their hands. Then they all raced across the Green Meadows to shake down some more nuts for Striped Chipmunk.

CHAPTER VI

REDDY FOX, THE BOASTER

Johnny Chuck waddled down the Lone Little Path across the Green Meadows. Johnny Chuck was very fat and rolly-poly. His yellow brown coat fitted him so snugly that it seemed as if it must burst. Johnny Chuck was feeling very happy—very happy indeed, for you see Johnny Chuck long ago found the best thing in the world, which is contentment.

Jolly, round, red Mr. Sun, looking down from the sky, smiled and smiled to see Johnny Chuck waddling down the Lone Little Path, for he loved the merry-hearted little fellow, as do all the little meadow people—all but Reddy Fox, for Reddy Fox has not forgotten the surprise Johnny Chuck once gave him and how he called him a "'fraid cat."

Once in a while Johnny Chuck stopped to brush his coat carefully, for he is very particular about his appearance, is Johnny Chuck. By and by he came to the old butternut tree down by the Smiling Pool. He could see it a long time before he reached it, and up in the top of it he could see Blacky the Crow flapping his wings and cawing at the top of his voice.

"There must be something going on," said Johnny Chuck to himself, and began to waddle faster. He looked so very queer when he tried to hurry that jolly round, red Mr. Sun smiled more than ever.

When he was almost to the old butter-nut tree Johnny Chuck sat up very straight so that his head came just above the tall meadow grasses beside the Lone Little Path. He could see the Merry Little Breezes dancing and racing under the old butternut tree and having such a good time! And he could see the long ears of Peter Rabbit standing up straight above the tall meadow grasses. One of the Merry Little Breezes spied Johnny Chuck.

"Hurry up, Johnny Chuck!" he shouted, and Johnny Chuck hurried.

When he reached the old butternut tree he was all out of breath. He was puffing and blowing and he was so warm that he wished just for a minute, a single little minute, that he could swim like Billy Mink and Jerry Muskrat and Little Joe Otter, so that he could jump into the Smiling Pool and cool off.

"Hello, Johnny Chuck!" shouted Peter Rabbit.

"Hello yourself, and see how you like it!" replied Johnny Chuck.

"Hello myself!" said Peter Rabbit.

And then because it was so very foolish everybody laughed. It is a good thing to feel foolishly happy on a beautiful sunshiny day, especially down on the Green Meadows.

Jimmy Skunk was there. He was feeling very, very good indeed, was Jimmy Skunk, for he had found some very fine beetles for his breakfast.

Little Joe Otter was there, and Billy Mink and Jerry Muskrat and Happy Jack Squirrel, and of course Reddy Fox was there. Oh my, yes, of course Reddy Fox was there! Reddy Fox never misses a chance to show off. He was wearing his very newest red coat and his whitest waistcoat.

He had brushed his tail till it looked very handsome, and every few minutes he would turn and admire it. Reddy Fox thought himself a very fine gentleman. He admired himself and he wanted every one else to admire him.

"Let's do stunts," said Peter Rabbit. "I can jump farther than anybody here!"

Then Peter Rabbit jumped a tremendously long jump. Then everybody jumped, everybody but Reddy Fox. Even Johnny Chuck jumped, and because he was so rolly-poly he tumbled over and over and everybody laughed and Johnny Chuck laughed loudest of all.

And because his hind legs are long and meant for jumping Peter Rabbit had jumped farther than any one else.

"I can climb to the top of the old butternut tree quicker than anybody else," cried Happy Jack Squirrel, and away he started with Bobby Coon and Billy Mink after him, for though Billy Mink is a famous swimmer and can run swiftly, he can also climb when he has to. But Happy Jack Squirrel was at the top of the old butternut tree almost before the others had started.

The Merry Little Breezes clapped their hands and everybody shouted for Happy Jack Squirrel, everybody but Reddy Fox.

"I can swim faster than anybody here," shouted Little Joe Otter.

In a flash three little brown coats splashed into the Smiling Pool so suddenly that they almost upset Great-Grandfather Frog watching from his big green lily pad. They belonged to Little Joe Otter, Billy Mink and Jerry Muskrat. Across the Smiling Pool and back again they raced and Little Joe Otter was first out on the bank.

"Hurrah for Little Joe Otter!" shouted Blacky the Crow.

And everybody shouted "Hurrah!" Everybody but Reddy Fox.

"What can you do, Jimmy Skunk?" asked Peter Rabbit, dancing up and down, he was so excited.

Jimmy Skunk yawned lazily.

"I can throw a wonderful perfume farther than anybody here," said Jimmy Skunk.

"We know it! We know it!" shouted the Merry Little Breezes as everybody tumbled heels over head away from Jimmy Skunk, even Reddy Fox. "But please don't!"

And Jimmy Skunk didn't.

Then they all came back, Reddy Fox carefully brushing his handsome red coat which had become sadly mussed, he had fled in such a hurry.

Now for the first time in his life Johnny Chuck began to feel just a wee, wee bit discontented. What was there he could do better than any one else? He couldn't jump and he couldn't climb and he couldn't swim. He couldn't even run fast, because he was so fat and round and rolly-poly. He quite forgot that he was so sunny-hearted and good-natured that everybody loved him, everybody but Reddy Fox.

Just then Reddy Fox began to boast, for Reddy Fox is a great boaster. "Pooh!" said Reddy Fox, "pooh! Anybody could jump if their legs were made for jumping. And what's the good of climbing trees anyway? Now I can run faster than anybody here—faster than anybody in the whole world!" said Reddy Fox, puffing himself out.

"Chug-a-rum," said Grandfather Frog. "You can't beat Spotty the Turtle."

Then everyone shouted and rolled over and over in the grass, they were so tickled, for every one remembered how Spotty the Turtle had once won a race from Reddy Fox.

For a minute Reddy Fox looked very foolish. Then he lost his temper, which is a very unwise thing to do, for it is hard to find again. He swelled himself out until every hair stood on end and he looked twice as big as he did before. He strutted up and down and glared at each in turn.

"And I'm not afraid of any living thing on the Green Meadows!" boasted Reddy Fox.

"Chug-a-rum," said Grandfather Frog. "Do I see Bowser the Hound?"

Every hair on Reddy Fox suddenly fell back into place. He whirled about nervously and anxiously looked over the Green Meadows. Then everybody shouted again and rolled over and over in the grass and held on to their sides, for you see Bowser the Hound wasn't there at all.

But everybody took good care to keep away from Reddy Fox, everybody but Johnny Chuck. He just sat still and chuckled and chuckled till his fat sides shook.

"What are you laughing at?" demanded Reddy Fox.

"I was just thinking," said Johnny Chuck, "that though you can run so fast, you can't even catch me."

Reddy Fox just glared at him for a minute, he was so mad. Then he sprang straight at Johnny Chuck.

"I'll show you!" he snarled.

Now Johnny Chuck had been sitting close beside a hole that Grandfather Chuck had dug a long time before and which was empty. In a flash Johnny Chuck disappeared head first in the hole. Now the hole was too small for Reddy Fox to enter, but he was so angry that he straightway began to dig it larger. My, how the sand did fly!



Then everybody shouted “Haw! Haw! Haw!”

It poured out behind Reddy Fox in a stream of shining yellow.

Johnny Chuck ran down the long tunnel underground until he reached the end. Then when he heard Reddy Fox digging and knew that he was really coming, Johnny Chuck began to dig, too, only instead of digging down he dug up towards the sunshine and the blue sky.

My, how his short legs did fly and his stout little claws dug into the soft earth! His little forepaws flew so fast that if you had been there you could hardly have seen them at all. And with his strong hind legs he kicked the sand right back into the face of Reddy Fox.

All the little meadow people gathered around the hole where Johnny Chuck and Reddy Fox had disappeared. They were very anxious, very anxious indeed. Would Reddy Fox catch Johnny Chuck? And what would he do to him? Was all their fun to end in something terrible to sunny-hearted, merry Johnny Chuck, whom everybody loved?

All of a sudden, pop! right out of the solid earth among the daisies and buttercups, just like a jack-in-the-box, came Johnny Chuck! He looked very warm and a little tired, but he was still chuckling as he scampered across to another hole of Grandfather Chuck's.

By and by something else crawled out of the hole Johnny Chuck had made. Could it be Reddy Fox? Where were his white waistcoat and beautiful red coat? And was that thing dragging behind him his splendid tail?

He crept out of the hole and then just lay down and panted for breath. He was almost too tired to move. Then he began to spit sand out of his mouth and blow it out of his nose and try to wipe it out of his eyes. The long hair of

his fine coat was filled full of sand and no one would ever have guessed that this was Reddy Fox.

"Haw! haw! haw!" shouted Blacky the Crow.

Then everybody shouted "Haw! haw! haw!" and began to roll in the grass and hold on to their sides once more; everybody but Reddy Fox. When he could get his breath he didn't look this way or that way, but just sneaked off to his home under the big hickory.

And when Old Mother West Wind came with her big bag to take the Merry Little Breezes to their home behind the Purple Hills, Johnny Chuck waddled back up the Lone Little Path chuckling to himself, for that little feeling of discontent was all gone. He had found that after all he could do something better than anybody else on the Green Meadows, for in his heart he knew that none could dig so fast as he.

CHAPTER VII

JOHNNY CHUCK'S SECRET

Johnny Chuck pushed up the last bit of gravel from the hole he had dug between the roots of the old apple tree in a corner of the Green Meadows. He smoothed it down on the big, yellow mound he had made in front of his door. Then he sat up very straight on top of the mound, brushed his coat, shook the sand from his trousers and carefully cleaned his hands.

After he had rested a bit, he turned around and looked at his new home, for that is what it was, although he had not come there to live yet, and no one knew of it, no one but jolly, round, red Mr. Sun, who, peeping between the branches of the old apple tree, had caught Johnny Chuck at work. But he wouldn't tell, not jolly Mr. Sun! Looking down from the blue sky every day he sees all sorts of queer things and he learns all kinds of secrets, does Mr. Sun, but he never, never tells. No, Sir! Mr. Sun never tells one of them, not even to Old Mother West Wind when at night they go down together behind the Purple Hills.

So jolly, round, red Mr. Sun just smiled and smiled when he discovered Johnny Chuck's secret, for that is just what the new home under the apple tree was—a secret. Not even the Merry Little Breezes, who find out almost everything, had discovered it.

Johnny Chuck chuckled to himself as he planned a back door, a beautiful back door, hidden behind a tall

clump of meadow grass where no one would think to look for a door. When he had satisfied himself as to just where he would put it, he once more sat up very straight on his nice, new mound and looked this way and looked that way to be sure that no one was near. Then he started for his old home along a secret little path he had made for himself.

Pretty soon he came to the Lone Little Path that went past his own home. He danced and he skipped along the Lone Little Path, and, because he was so happy, he tried to turn a somersault. But Johnny Chuck was so round and fat and rolly-poly that he just tumbled over in a heap.

"Well, well, well! What's the matter with you?" said a voice close beside him before he could pick himself up. It was Jimmy Skunk, who was out looking for some beetles for his dinner.

Johnny Chuck scrambled to his feet and looked foolish, very foolish indeed.

"There's nothing the matter with me, Jimmy Skunk," said Johnny. "There's nothing the matter with me. It's just because I've got a secret."

"A secret!" cried Jimmy Skunk. "What is it?"

"Yes, a secret, a really, truly secret," said Johnny Chuck, and looked very important.

"Tell me, Johnny Chuck. Come on, tell just me, and then we'll have the secret together," begged Jimmy Skunk.

Now Johnny Chuck was so tickled with his secret that it seemed as if he must share it with some one. He just couldn't keep it to himself any longer.

"You won't tell any one?" said Johnny Chuck.

Jimmy Skunk promised that he wouldn't tell a soul.

"Cross your heart," commanded Johnny Chuck.

Jimmy Skunk crossed his heart.

Then Johnny Chuck looked this way and looked that way to be sure that no one was listening. Finally he whispered in Jimmy Skunk's ear:

"I've got a new home under the old apple tree in a corner of the Green Meadows," said Johnny Chuck.

Of course Jimmy Skunk was very much surprised and very much interested, so Johnny Chuck told him all about it.

"Now, remember, it's a secret," said Johnny Chuck, as Jimmy Skunk started off down the Lone Little Path across the Green Meadows, to look for some beetles.

"I'll remember," said Jimmy Skunk.

"And don't tell!" called Johnny Chuck.

Jimmy Skunk promised that he wouldn't tell. Then Johnny Chuck started off up the Lone Little Path, whistling, and Jimmy Skunk trotted down the Lone Little Path onto the Green Meadows.

Jimmy Skunk was thinking so much about Johnny Chuck's new home that he quite forgot to look for beetles, and he almost ran into Peter Rabbit.

"Hello, Jimmy Skunk," said Peter Rabbit, "can't you see where you are going? It must be you have something on your mind; what is it?"

"I was thinking of Johnny Chuck's new home," said Jimmy Skunk.

"Johnny Chuck's new home!" exclaimed Peter Rabbit. "Has Johnny Chuck got a new home? Where is it?"

"Under the roots of the old apple tree in a corner of the Green Meadows," said Jimmy Skunk, and then he clapped both hands over his mouth. You see he hadn't really meant to tell. It just slipped out.

"Oh, but it's a secret!" cried Jimmy Skunk. "It's a secret, and you mustn't tell. I guess Johnny Chuck won't mind if you know, Peter Rabbit, but you mustn't tell any one else." Peter Rabbit promised he wouldn't.

Now Peter Rabbit is very inquisitive, very inquisitive indeed. So as soon as he had parted from Jimmy Skunk he made up his mind that he must see the new home of Johnny Chuck. So off he started as fast as he could go towards the old apple tree in a corner of the Green Meadows. Half way there he met Reddy Fox.

"Hello, Peter Rabbit! Where are you going in such a hurry?" asked Reddy Fox.

"Over to the old apple tree to see Johnny Chuck's new home," replied Peter Rabbit as he tried to dodge past Reddy Fox. Then of a sudden he remembered and clapped both hands over his mouth.

"Oh, but it's a secret, Reddy Fox. It's a secret, and you mustn't tell!" cried Peter Rabbit.

But Reddy Fox wouldn't promise that he wouldn't tell, for in spite of his handsome coat and fine manners, Reddy Fox is a scamp. And, besides, he has no love for Johnny Chuck, for he has not forgotten how Johnny Chuck once made him run and called him a "'fraid cat."

So when Reddy Fox left Peter Rabbit he grinned a wicked grin and hurried off to find Bobby Coon. He met him on his way to the Laughing Brook. Reddy Fox told Bobby Coon all about Johnny Chuck's secret and then hurried away after Peter Rabbit, for Reddy Fox also is very inquisitive.

Bobby Coon went on down to the Laughing Brook. There he met Billy Mink and told him about the new

home Johnny Chuck had made under the old apple tree in a corner of the Green Meadows.

Pretty soon Billy Mink met Little Joe Otter and told him.

Then Little Joe Otter met Jerry Muskrat and told him.

Jerry Muskrat saw Blacky the Crow and told him, and Great-Grandfather Frog heard him.

Blacky the Crow met his first cousin, Sammy Jay, and told him.

Sammy Jay met Happy Jack Squirrel and told him.

Happy Jack met his cousin, Striped Chipmunk, and told him.

Striped Chipmunk passed the house of old Mr. Toad and told him.

The next morning, very early, before Old Mother West Wind had come down from the Purple Hills, Johnny Chuck stole over to his new home to begin work on his new back door. He had hardly begun to dig when he heard some one cough right behind him. He whirled around and there sat Peter Rabbit looking as innocent and surprised as if he had really just discovered the new home for the first time.

"What a splendid new home you have, Johnny Chuck!" said Peter Rabbit.

"Y—e—s," said Johnny Chuck, slowly. "It's a secret," he added suddenly. "You won't tell, will you, Peter Rabbit?"

Peter Rabbit promised that he wouldn't tell. Then Johnny Chuck felt better and went back to work as soon as Peter Rabbit left.

He had hardly begun, however, when some one just above him said: "Good morning, Johnny Chuck."

Johnny Chuck looked up and there in the old apple tree sat Blacky the Crow and his cousin, Sammy Jay.

Just then there was a rustle in the grass and out popped Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter and Jerry Muskrat and Happy Jack Squirrel and Striped Chipmunk and Bobby Coon. When Johnny Chuck had recovered from his surprise and looked over to the doorway of his new home there sat Reddy Fox on Johnny Chuck's precious new mound. It seemed as if all the little meadow people were there, all but Jimmy Skunk, who wisely stayed away.

"We've come to see your new home," said Striped Chipmunk, "and we think it's the nicest home we've seen for a long time."

"It's so nicely hidden away, it's really quite secret," said Reddy Fox, grinning wickedly.

Just then up raced the Merry Little Breezes and one of them had a message for Johnny Chuck from Great-Grandfather Frog. It was this:

"Whisper a secret to a friend and you shout it in the ear of the whole world."

After every one had admired the new home, they said good-bye and scattered over the Green Meadows. Then Johnny Chuck began to dig again, but this time he wasn't making his new back door. No indeed! Johnny Chuck was digging at that new mound of yellow gravel of which he had been so proud. Jolly, round, red Mr. Sun blinked to be sure that he saw aright, for Johnny Chuck was filling up his new home between the roots of the old apple tree. When he got through, there wasn't any new home.

Then Johnny Chuck brushed his coat carefully, shook the sand out of his trousers, wiped his hands and started off for his old home. And this time he didn't take his

special hidden path, for Johnny Chuck didn't care who saw him go.

Late that afternoon, Johnny Chuck sat on his old doorstep, with his chin in his hands, watching Old Mother West Wind gathering her Merry Little Breezes into the big bag in which she carries them to their home behind the Purple Hills.

"'Whisper a secret to a friend and you shout it in the ear of the whole world.' Now what did Grandfather Frog mean by that?" thought Johnny Chuck. "Now I didn't tell anybody but Jimmy Skunk and Jimmy Skunk didn't tell anyone but Peter Rabbit and—and—"

Then Johnny Chuck began to chuckle and finally to laugh. "'Whisper a secret to a friend and you shout it in the ear of the whole world.' My gracious, what a loud voice I must have had and didn't know it!" said Johnny Chuck, wiping the tears of laughter from his eyes.

And the next day Johnny Chuck started to make a new home. Where? Oh, that's Johnny Chuck's secret. And no one but jolly, round, red Mr. Sun has found it out yet.

CHAPTER VIII

JOHNNY CHUCK'S GREAT FIGHT

Johnny Chuck sat on the doorstep of his new home, looking away across the Green Meadows. Johnny Chuck felt very well satisfied with himself and with all the world. He yawned lazily and stretched and stretched and then settled himself comfortably to watch the Merry Little Breezes playing down by the Smiling Pool.

By and by he saw Peter Rabbit go bobbing along down the Lone Little Path. Lipperty, lipperty, lip, went Peter Rabbit and every other jump he looked behind him.

"Now what is Peter Rabbit up to?" said Johnny Chuck to himself, "and what does he keep looking behind him for?"

Johnny Chuck sat up a little straighter to watch Peter Rabbit hop down the Lone Little Path. Then of a sudden he caught sight of something that made him sit up straighter than ever and open his eyes very wide. Something was following Peter Rabbit. Yes, Sir, something was bobbing along right at Peter Rabbit's heels.

Johnny Chuck forgot the Merry Little Breezes. He forgot how warm it was and how lazy he felt. He forgot everything else in his curiosity to learn what it could be following so closely at Peter Rabbit's heels.

Presently Peter Rabbit stopped and sat up very straight and then—Johnny Chuck nearly tumbled over in sheer surprise! He rubbed his eyes to make sure that he saw

aright, for there were two Peter Rabbits! Yes, Sir, there were two Peter Rabbits, only one was very small, very small indeed.

"Oh!" said Johnny Chuck, "that must be Peter Rabbit's baby brother!"

Then he began to chuckle till his fat sides shook. There sat Peter Rabbit with his funny long ears standing straight up, and there right behind him, dressed exactly like him, sat Peter Rabbit's baby brother with his funny little long ears standing straight up. When Peter Rabbit wiggled his right ear, his baby brother wiggled his right ear. When Peter Rabbit scratched his left ear, his baby brother scratched his left ear. Whatever Peter Rabbit did, his baby brother did too.

Presently Peter Rabbit started on down the Lone Little Path—lipperty, lipperty, lip, and right at his heels went his baby brother—lipperty, lipperty, lip. Johnny Chuck watched them out of sight, and then he settled himself on his doorstep once more to enjoy a sun bath. Every once in a while he chuckled to himself as he remembered how funny Peter Rabbit's baby brother had looked. Presently Johnny Chuck fell asleep.

Jolly, round, red Mr. Sun had climbed quite high in the sky when Johnny Chuck awoke. He yawned and stretched and stretched and yawned, and then he sat up to look over the Green Meadows. Then he became wide awake, very wide awake indeed! Way down on the Green Meadows he caught a glimpse of something red jumping about in the long meadow grass.

"That must be Reddy Fox," thought Johnny Chuck. "Yes, it surely is Reddy Fox. Now I wonder what mischief he is up to."

Then he saw all the Merry Little Breezes racing towards Reddy Fox as fast as they could go. And there was Sammy Jay screaming at the top of his voice, and his cousin, Blacky the Crow. Happy Jack Squirrel was dancing up and down excitedly on the branch of an old elm close by.

Johnny Chuck waited to see no more, but started down the Lone Little Path to find out what it all was about. Half way down the Lone Little Path he met Peter Rabbit running as hard as he could. His long ears were laid flat back, his big eyes seemed to pop right out of his head, and he was running as Johnny Chuck had never seen him run before.

"What are you running so for, Peter Rabbit?" asked Johnny Chuck.

"To get Bowser the Hound," shouted Peter Rabbit over his shoulder, as he tried to run faster.

"Now what can be the matter?" said Johnny Chuck to himself, "to send Peter Rabbit after Bowser the Hound?" He knew that, like all the other little meadow people, there was nothing of which Peter Rabbit was so afraid as Farmer Brown's great dog, Bowser the Hound.

Johnny Chuck hurried down the Lone Little Path as fast as his short legs could take his fat, rolly-poly self.

Presently he came out onto the Green Meadows, and there he saw a sight that set every nerve in his round little body a-tingle with rage.

Reddy Fox had found Peter Rabbit's baby brother and was doing his best to frighten him to death.

"I'm going to eat you now," shouted Reddy Fox, and then he sprang on Peter Rabbit's baby brother and gave him a cuff that sent him heels over head sprawling in the grass.

"Coward! Coward, Reddy Fox!" shrieked Sammy Jay.

"Shame! Shame!" shouted the Merry Little Breezes.

"You're nothing but a great big bully!" yelled Blacky the Crow.

But no one did anything to help Peter Rabbit's baby brother, for Reddy Fox is so much bigger than any of the rest of them, except Bobby Coon, that all the little meadow people are afraid of him.

But Reddy Fox just laughed at them, and nipped the long ears of Peter Rabbit's little brother so hard that he cried with the pain.

Now all were so intent watching Reddy Fox torment the baby brother of Peter Rabbit that no one had seen Johnny Chuck coming down the Lone Little Path. And for a few minutes no one recognized the furious little yellow-brown bundle that suddenly knocked Reddy Fox over and seized him by the throat. You see it didn't look a bit like Johnny Chuck. Every hair was standing on end, he was so mad, and this made him appear twice as big as they had ever seen him before.

"Coward! Coward! Coward!" shrieked Johnny Chuck as he shook Reddy Fox by the throat. And then began the greatest fight that the Green Meadows had ever seen.

Now Johnny Chuck is not naturally a fighter. Oh my, no! He is so good-natured and so sunny-hearted that he seldom quarrels with any one. But when he has to fight, there isn't a cowardly hair on him, not the teeniest, weeniest one. No one ever has a chance to cry, "'Fraid cat! Cry baby!" after Johnny Chuck.

So though, like all the other little meadow people, he was usually just a little afraid of Reddy Fox, because Reddy is so much bigger, he forgot all about it as soon as he

caught sight of Reddy Fox tormenting Peter Rabbit's little brother. He didn't stop to think of what might happen to himself. He didn't stop to think at all. He just gritted his teeth and in a flash had Reddy Fox on his back.

Such a fight was never seen before on the Green Meadows! Reddy Fox is a bully and a coward, for he never fights with any one of his own size if he can help it, but when he has to fight, he fights hard. And he certainly had to fight now.

"Bully!" hissed Johnny Chuck as with his stout little hind feet he ripped the bright red coat of Reddy Fox. "You great big bully!"

Over and over they rolled, Johnny Chuck on top, then Reddy Fox on top, then Johnny Chuck up again, clawing and snarling.

It seemed as if news of the fight had gone over all the Green Meadows, for the little meadow people came running from every direction—Billy Mink, Little Joe Otter, Jerry Muskrat, Striped Chipmunk, Jimmy Skunk, old Mr. Toad. Even Great-Grandfather Frog, who left his big lily pad, and came hurrying with great jumps across the Green Meadows. They formed a ring around Reddy Fox and Johnny Chuck and danced with excitement. And all wanted Johnny Chuck to win.

Peter Rabbit's poor little brother, so sore and lame from the knocking about from Reddy Fox, and so frightened that he hardly dared breathe, lay flat on the ground under a little bush and was forgotten by all but the Merry Little Breezes, who covered him up with some dead grass, and kissed him and whispered to him not to be afraid now. How Peter Rabbit's little brother did hope that Johnny Chuck would win! His great, big, round, soft eyes

were wide with terror as he thought of what might happen to him if Reddy Fox should whip Johnny Chuck.

But Reddy Fox wasn't whipping Johnny Chuck. Try as he would, he could not get a good hold on that round, fat, little body. And Johnny Chuck's stout claws were ripping his red coat and white vest and Johnny Chuck's sharp teeth were gripping him so that they could not be shaken loose. Pretty soon Reddy Fox began to think of nothing but getting away. Every one was shouting for Johnny Chuck. Every time Reddy Fox was underneath, he would hear a great shout from all the little meadow people, and he knew that they were glad.

Now Johnny Chuck was round and fat and rolly-poly, and when one is round and fat and rolly-poly, one's breath is apt to be short. So it was with Johnny Chuck. He had fought so hard that his breath was nearly gone. Finally he loosed his hold on Reddy Fox for just a second to draw in a good breath. Reddy Fox saw his chance, and, with a quick pull and spring, he broke away.

How all the little meadow people did scatter! You see they were very brave, very brave indeed, so long as Johnny Chuck had Reddy Fox down, but now that Reddy Fox was free, each one was suddenly afraid and thought only of himself. Jimmy Skunk knocked Jerry Muskrat flat in his hurry to get away. Billy Mink trod on Great-Grandfather Frog's big feet and didn't even say "Excuse me." Striped Chipmunk ran head first into a big thistle and squealed as much from fear as pain.

But Reddy Fox paid no attention to any of them. He just wanted to get away, and off he started, limping as fast as he could go up the Lone Little Path. Such a looking sight! His beautiful red coat was in tatters. His face was

scratched. He hobbled as he ran. And just as he broke away, Johnny Chuck made a grab and pulled a great mouthful of hair out of the splendid tail Reddy Fox was so proud of.

When the little meadow people saw that Reddy Fox was actually running away, they stopped running themselves, and all began to shout: "Reddy Fox is a coward and a bully! Coward! Coward!" Then they crowded around Johnny Chuck and all began talking at once about his great fight.

Just then they heard a great noise up on the hill. They saw Reddy Fox coming back down the Lone Little Path, and he was using his legs just as well as he knew how. Right behind him, his great mouth open and waking all the echoes with his big voice, was Bowser the Hound.

You see, although Peter Rabbit couldn't fight for his little baby brother and is usually very, very timid, he isn't altogether a coward. Indeed, he had been very brave, very brave indeed. He had gone up to Farmer Brown's and had jumped right under the nose of Bowser the Hound. Now that is something that Bowser the Hound never can stand. So off he had started after Peter Rabbit. And Peter Rabbit had started back for the Green Meadows as fast as his long legs could take him, for he knew that if once Bowser the Hound caught sight of Reddy Fox, he would forget all about such a little thing as a saucy rabbit.

Sure enough, half way down the Lone Little Path they met Reddy Fox sneaking off home, and, when Bowser the Hound saw him, he straightway forgot all about Peter Rabbit, and, with a great roar, started after Reddy Fox.

When Johnny Chuck had carefully brushed his coat and all the little meadow people had wished him good

luck, he started off up the Lone Little Path for home, the Merry Little Breezes dancing ahead and Peter Rabbit coming lipperty, lipperty, lip behind, and right between them hopped Peter Rabbit's little brother, who thought Johnny Chuck the greatest hero in the world.

When they reached Johnny Chuck's old home, Peter Rabbit and Peter Rabbit's little brother tried to tell him how thankful they were to him, but Johnny Chuck just laughed and said: "It was nothing at all, just nothing at all."

When at last all had gone, even the Merry Little Breezes, Johnny Chuck slipped away to his new home, which is his secret, you know, which no one knows but jolly, round, red Mr. Sun, who won't tell.

"I hope," said Johnny Chuck, as he stretched himself out on the mound of warm sand by his doorway, for he was very tired, "I hope," said Johnny Chuck, sighing contentedly, "that Reddy Fox got away from Bowser the Hound!"

And Reddy Fox did.

CHAPTER IX

MR. TOAD'S OLD SUIT

Peter Rabbit was tired and very sleepy as he hopped along the Crooked Little Path down the hill. He could see Old Mother West Wind just emptying her Merry Little Breezes out of her big bag onto the Green Meadows to play all the bright summer day. Peter Rabbit yawned and yawned again as he watched them dance over to the Smiling Pool. Then he hopped on down the Crooked Little Path towards home.

Sammy Jay, sitting on a fence post, saw him coming.

> "Peter Rabbit out all night!
> Oh my goodness what a sight!
> Peter Rabbit, reprobate!
> No good end will be your fate!"

shouted Sammy Jay.

Peter Rabbit ran out his tongue at Sammy Jay.

"Who stole Happy Jack's nuts? Thief! Thief! Thief!" shouted Peter Rabbit at Sammy Jay, and kept on down the Crooked Little Path.

It was true—Peter Rabbit had been out all night playing in the moonlight, stealing a midnight feast in Farmer Brown's cabbage patch and getting into mischief with Bobby Coon. Now when most of the little meadow people were just waking up Peter Rabbit was thinking of bed.

Presently he came to a big piece of bark which is the roof of Mr. Toad's house. Mr. Toad was sitting in his doorway blinking at jolly, round, red Mr. Sun, who had just begun to climb up the sky.

"Good morning, Mr. Toad," said Peter Rabbit.

"Good morning," said Mr. Toad.

"You're looking very fine this morning, Mr. Toad," said Peter Rabbit.

"I'm feeling very fine this morning," said Mr. Toad.

"Why, my gracious, you have on a new suit, Mr. Toad!" exclaimed Peter Rabbit.

"Well, what if I have, Peter Rabbit?" demanded Mr. Toad.

"Oh, nothing, nothing, nothing at all, Mr. Toad, nothing at all," said Peter Rabbit hastily, "only I didn't know you ever had a new suit. What have you done with your old suit, Mr. Toad?"

"Swallowed it," said Mr. Toad shortly, turning his back on Peter Rabbit.

And that was all Peter Rabbit could get out of Mr. Toad, so he started on down the Crooked Little Path. Now Peter Rabbit has a great deal of curiosity and is forever poking into other people's affairs. The more he thought about it the more he wondered what Mr. Toad could have done with his old suit. Of course he hadn't swallowed it! Who ever heard of such a thing! The more he thought of it the more Peter Rabbit felt that he must know what Mr. Toad had done with his old suit. By this time he had forgotten that he had been out all night. He had forgotten that he was sleepy. He had got to find out about Mr. Toad's old suit.

"I'll just run over to the Smiling Pool and ask Grandfather Frog. He'll surely know what Mr. Toad does with his old suits," said Peter Rabbit, and began to hop faster.

When he reached the Smiling Pool there sat Great-Grandfather Frog on his big green lily pad as usual. There was a hungry look in his big goggly eyes, for it was so early that no foolish, green flies had come his way yet. But Peter Rabbit was too full of curiosity in Mr. Toad's affairs to notice this.

"Good morning, Grandfather Frog," said Peter Rabbit.

"Good morning," replied Grandfather Frog a wee bit gruffly.

"You're looking very fine this morning, Grandfather Frog," said Peter Rabbit.

"Not so fine as I'd feel if I had a few fat, foolish, green flies," said Grandfather Frog.

"I've just met your cousin, Mr. Toad, and he has on a new suit," said Peter Rabbit.

"Indeed!" replied Grandfather Frog. "Well, I think it's high time."

"What does Mr. Toad do with his old suit, Grandfather Frog?" asked Peter Rabbit.

"Chug-a-rum! It's none of my business. Maybe he swallows it," replied Grandfather Frog crossly, and turned his back on Peter Rabbit.

Peter Rabbit saw that his curiosity must remain unsatisfied. He suddenly remembered that he had been out all night and was very, very sleepy, so he started off home across the Green Meadows.

Now the Merry Little Breezes had heard all that Peter Rabbit and Grandfather Frog had said, and they made up

their minds that they would find out from Grandfather Frog what Mr. Toad really did do with his old suit. First of all they scattered over the Green Meadows. Presently back they all came, each blowing ahead of him a fat, foolish, green fly. Right over to the big green lily pad they blew the green flies.

"Chug-a-rum! Chug-a-rum! Chug-a-rum!" said Grandfather Frog, as each fat, foolish, green fly disappeared inside his white and yellow waistcoat. When the last one was out of sight, all but a leg which was left sticking out of a corner of Grandfather Frog's big mouth, one of the Merry Little Breezes ventured to ask him what became of Mr. Toad's old suit.

Grandfather Frog settled himself comfortably on the big green lily pad and folded his hands across his white and yellow waistcoat.

"Chug-a-rum," began Grandfather Frog. "Once upon a time—"

The Merry Little Breezes clapped their hands and settled themselves among the buttercups and daisies, for they knew that soon they would know what Mr. Toad did with his old suit.

"Once upon a time," began Grandfather Frog again, "when the world was young, old King Bear received word that old Mother Nature would visit the Green Meadows and the Green Forest. Of course old King Bear wanted his kingdom and his subjects to look their very best, so he issued a royal order that every one of the little meadow people and every one of the little forest folk should wear a new suit on the day that old Mother Nature was to pay her visit.

"Now like old King Bear, every one wanted to appear his very best before old Mother Nature, but as no one knew the exact day she was to come, every one began at once to wear his best suit, and to take the greatest care of it. Old King Bear appeared every day in a suit of glossy black. Lightfoot the Deer, threw away his dingy gray suit, and put on a coat of beautiful red and fawn. Mr. Mink, Mr. Otter, Mr. Muskrat, Mr. Rabbit, Mr. Woodchuck, Mr. Coon, who you know was first cousin to old King Bear, Mr. Gray Squirrel, Mr. Fox Squirrel, Mr. Red Squirrel, all put on brand new suits. Mr. Skunk changed his black and white stripes for a suit of all black, very handsome, very handsome indeed. Mr. Chipmunk took care to see that his new suit had the most beautiful stripes to be obtained.

"Mr. Jay, who was something of a dandy, had a wonderful new coat that looked for all the world as it if had been cut from the bluest patch of sky and trimmed with edging taken from the whitest clouds. Even Mr. Crow and Mr. Owl took pains to look their very best.

"But Mr. Toad couldn't see the need of such a fuss. He thought his neighbors spent altogether too much time and thought on dress. To be sure he was anxious to look his best when old Mother Nature came, so he got a new suit all ready. But Mr. Toad couldn't afford to sit around in idleness admiring his new clothes. No indeed! Mr. Toad had too much to do. He was altogether too busy. He had a large garden to take care of, had Mr. Toad, and work in a garden is very hard on clothes. So Mr. Toad just wore his old suit over his new one and went on about his business.

"By and by the great day came when old Mother Nature arrived to inspect the kingdom of old King Bear. All the little meadow people and all the little forest folk

hastened to pay their respects to old Mother Nature and to strut about in their fine clothes—all but Mr. Toad. He was so busy that he didn't even know that old Mother Nature had arrived.

"Late in the afternoon, Mr. Toad stopped to rest. He had just cleared his cabbage patch of the slugs which threatened to eat up his crop and he was very tired. Presently he happened to look up the road, and who should he see but old Mother Nature herself coming to visit his garden and to find out why Mr. Toad had not been to pay her his respects.

"Suddenly Mr. Toad remembered that he had on his working clothes, which were very old, very dirty and very ragged. For just a minute he didn't know what to do. Then he dived under a cabbage leaf and began to pull off his old suit. But the old suit stuck! He was in such a hurry and so excited that he couldn't find the buttons. Finally he got his trousers off. Then he reached over and got hold of the back of his coat and tugged and hauled until finally he pulled his old coat off right over his head just as if it were a shirt.

"Mr. Toad gave a great sigh of relief as he stepped out in his new suit, for you remember that he had been wearing that new suit underneath the old one all the time.

"Mr. Toad was very well pleased with himself until he thought how terribly untidy that ragged old suit looked lying on the ground. What should he do with it? He couldn't hide it in the garden, for old Mother Nature's eyes are so sharp that she would be sure to see it. What should he do?

"Then Mr. Toad had a happy thought. Every one made fun of his big mouth. But what was a big mouth for if not to use? He would swallow his old suit! In a flash Mr. Toad

dived under the cabbage leaf and crammed his old suit into his mouth.

"When old Mother Nature came into the garden, Mr. Toad was waiting in the path to receive her. Very fine he looked in his new suit and you would have thought he had been waiting all day to receive old Mother Nature, but for one thing—swallow as much and as hard as he would, he couldn't get down quite all of his old suit, and a leg of his trousers hung out of a corner of his big mouth.

"Of course old Mother Nature saw it right away. And how she did laugh! And of course Mr. Toad felt very much mortified. But Mother Nature was so pleased with Mr. Toad's garden and with Mr. Toad's industry that she quite overlooked the ragged trousers leg hanging from the corner of Mr. Toad's mouth.

"'Fine clothes arc not to be compared with fine work,' said old Mother Nature. 'I herewith appoint you my chief gardener, Mr. Toad. And as a sign that all may know that this is so, hereafter you shall always swallow your old suit whenever you change your clothes!'

"And from that day to this the toads have been the very best of gardeners. And in memory of their great, great, great-grandfather a thousand times removed they have always swallowed their old suits.

"Now you know what my cousin, old Mr. Toad, did with his old suit just before Peter Rabbit passed his house this morning," concluded Great-Grandfather Frog.

"Oh," cried the Merry Little Breezes, "thank you, thank you, Grandfather Frog!"

Then they raced away across the Green Meadows and up the Crooked Little Path to see if old Mr. Toad was

gardening. And Peter Rabbit still wonders what old Mr. Toad did with his old suit.

CHAPTER X

GRANDFATHER FROG GETS EVEN

Old Grandfather Frog sat on his big green lily pad in the Smiling Pool dreaming of the days when the world was young and the frogs ruled the world. His hands were folded across his white and yellow waistcoat. Round, red, smiling Mr. Sun sent down his warmest rays on the back of Grandfather Frog's green coat.

Very early that morning Old Mother West Wind, hurrying down from the Purple Hills on her way to help the white-sailed ships across the great ocean, had stopped long enough to blow three or four fat, foolish, green flies over to the big lily pad, and they were now safely inside the white and yellow waistcoat. A thousand little tadpoles, the great, great-grandchildren of Grandfather Frog, were playing in the Smiling Pool, and every once in a while wriggling up to the big lily pad to look with awe at Grandfather Frog and wonder if they would ever be as handsome and big and wise as he.

And still old Grandfather Frog sat dreaming and dreaming of the days when all the frogs had tails and ruled the world.

Presently Billy Mink came hopping and skipping down the Laughing Brook. Sometimes he swam a little way and sometimes he ran a little way along the bank, and sometimes he jumped from stone to stone. Billy Mink was feeling very good—very good indeed. He had caught a fine

fat trout for breakfast. He had hidden two more away for dinner in a snug little hole no one knew of but himself. Now he had nothing to do but get into mischief. You can always depend upon Billy Mink to get into mischief. He just can't help it.

So Billy Mink came hopping and skipping down the Laughing Brook to the Smiling Pool. Then he stopped, as still as the rock he was standing on, and peeped through the bulrushes. Billy Mink is very cautious, very cautious indeed. He always looks well before he shows himself, that nothing may surprise him.

So Billy Mink looked all over the Smiling Pool and the grassy banks. He saw the sunbeams dancing on the water. He saw the tadpoles having such a good time in the Smiling Pool. He saw the Merry Little Breezes kissing the buttercups and daisies on the bank, and he saw old Grandfather Frog with his hands folded across his white, and yellow waistcoat sitting on the green lily pad, dreaming of the days when the world was young.

Then Billy Mink took a long breath, a very long breath, and dived into the Smiling Pool. Now, Billy Mink can swim very fast, very fast indeed. For a little way he can swim even faster than Mr. Trout. And he can stay under water a long time.

Straight across the Smiling Pool, with not even the tip of his nose out of water, swam Billy Mink. The thousand little tadpoles saw him coming and fled in all directions to bury themselves in the mud at the bottom of the Smiling Pool, for when he thinks no one is looking Billy Mink sometimes gobbles up a fat tadpole for breakfast.

Straight across the Smiling Pool swam Billy Mink toward the big green lily pad where Grandfather Frog sat

dreaming of the days when the world was young. When he was right under the big green lily pad he suddenly kicked up hard with his hind feet. Up went the big green lily pad, and, of course, up went Grandfather Frog—up and over flat on his back, with a great splash into the Smiling Pool!

Now, Grandfather Frog's mouth is very big. Indeed, no one else has so big a mouth, unless it be his cousin, old Mr. Toad. And when Grandfather Frog went over flat on his back, splash in the Smiling Pool, his mouth was wide open.

You see he was so surprised he forgot to close it. So, of course, Grandfather Frog swallowed a great deal of water, and he choked and spluttered and swam around in foolish little circles trying to find himself. Finally he climbed out on his big green lily pad.

"Chug-a-rum?" said Grandfather Frog, and looked this way and looked that way. Then he gave a funny hop and turned about in the opposite direction and looked this way and looked that way, but all he saw was the Smiling Pool dimpling and smiling, Mrs. Redwing bringing a fat worm to her hungry little babies in their snug nest in the bulrushes, and the Merry Little Breezes hurrying over to see what the trouble might be.

"Chug-a-rum!" said Grandfather Frog. "It is very strange. I must have fallen asleep and had a bad dream."

Then he once more settled himself comfortably on the big green lily pad, folded his hands across his white and yellow waistcoat, and seemed to be dreaming again, only his big goggly eyes were not dreaming. No, indeed! They were very much awake, and they saw all that was going on in the Smiling Pool. Great Grandfather Frog was just pretending. You may fool him once, but Grandfather Frog



He was so surprised he forgot to close it.

has lived so long that he has become very wise, and though Billy Mink is very smart, it takes some one a great deal smarter than Billy Mink to fool Grandfather Frog twice in the same way.

Billy Mink, hiding behind the Big Rock, had laughed and laughed till he had to hold his sides when Grandfather Frog had choked and spluttered and hopped about on the big lily pad trying to find out what it all meant. He thought it such a good joke that he couldn't keep it to himself, so when he saw Little Joe Otter coming to try his slippery slide he swam across to tell him all about it. Little Joe Otter laughed and laughed until he had to hold his sides. Then they both swam back to hide behind the Big Rock to watch until Grandfather Frog should forget all about it, and they could play the trick over again.

Now, out of the corner of one of his big goggly eyes, Grandfather Frog had seen Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter with their heads close together, laughing and holding their sides, and he saw them swim over behind the Big Rock. Pretty soon one of the Merry Little Breezes danced over to see if Grandfather Frog had really gone to sleep. Grandfather Frog didn't move, not the teeniest, weeniest bit, but he whispered something to the Merry Little Breeze, and the Merry Little Breeze flew away, shaking with laughter, to where the other Merry Little Breezes were playing with the buttercups and daisies.

Then all the Merry Little Breezes clapped their hands and laughed too. They left the buttercups and daisies and began to play tag across the Smiling Pool.

Now, right on the edge of the Big Rock lay a big stick. Pretty soon the Merry Little Breezes danced over to the Big Rock, and then, suddenly, all together they gave the big

stick a push. Off it went, and then such a splashing and squealing as there was behind the Big Rock!

In a few moments Little Joe Otter crept out beside his slippery slide and slipped away holding on to his head. And, sneaking through the bulrushes, so as not to be seen, crawled Billy Mink, back towards his home on the Laughing Brook. Billy Mink wasn't laughing now. Oh, no! He was limping and he was holding on to his head. Little Joe Otter and Billy Mink had been sitting right underneath the big stick.

"Chug-a-rum!" said Grandfather Frog and held on to his sides and opened his mouth very wide in a noiseless laugh, for Grandfather Frog never makes a sound when he laughs.

"Chug-a-rum!" said Grandfather Frog once more. Then he folded his hands across his white and yellow waistcoat and began again to dream of the days when the frogs had long tails and ruled the world.

CHAPTER XI

THE DISAPPOINTED BUSH

Way down beside the Laughing Brook grew a little bush. It looked a whole lot like other little bushes all around it. But really it was quite different, as you shall see. When in the spring warm, jolly, round Mr. Sun brought back the birds and set them singing, when the little flowers popped their heads out of the ground to have a look around, then all the little bushes put out their green leaves.

This little bush of which I am telling you put out its green leaves with the rest. The little leaves grew bigger and bigger on all the little bushes. By and by on some of the other little bushes, little brown buds began to appear and grow and grow. Then on more and more of the little bushes the little brown buds came and grew and grew. But on this little bush of which I am telling you no little brown buds appeared. The little bush felt very sad indeed.

Pretty soon all the little brown buds on the other little brown bushes burst their brown coats, and then all the little bushes were covered with little flowers. Some were white and some were yellow and some were pink; and the air was filled with the sweet odor of all the little flowers. It brought the bees from far, far away to gather the honey, and all the little bushes were very happy indeed.

But the little bush of which I am telling you had no little flowers, for you see it had had no little buds, and it felt lonely and shut away from the other little bushes, and

very sad indeed. But it bravely kept on growing and growing and growing. Its little leaves grew bigger and bigger and bigger, and it tried its best not to mind because it had no little flowers.

Then one by one, and two by two, and three by three, and finally in whole showers, the little flowers of all the other little bushes fell off, and they looked very much like the little bush of which I am telling you, so that the little bush no longer felt sad.

All summer long all the little bushes grew and grew and grew. The birds came and built their nests among them. Peter Rabbit and his brothers and sisters scampered under them. The butterflies flew over them.

By and by came the fall, and with the fall came Jack Frost. He went about among the little bushes, pinching the leaves. Then the little green leaves turned to brown and red and yellow and pretty soon they fluttered down to the ground, the Merry Little Breezes blew them about and all the little bushes were bare. They had no leaves at all to cover their little naked brown limbs.

The little bush of which I am telling you lost its leaves with the rest. But all the summer long this little bush had been growing some of those little brown buds, which the other bushes had had in the spring, and now, when all the other little bushes had lost all the green leaves, and had nothing at all upon their little brown twigs, behold! one beautiful day, the little bush of which I am telling you was covered with gold, for each little brown bud had burst its little brown coat and there was a beautiful little yellow flower. Such a multitude of these little yellow flowers! They covered the little bush from top to bottom. Then the little bush felt very happy indeed, for it was the only bush which

had any flowers. And every one who passed that way stopped to look at it and to praise it.

Colder grew the weather and colder. Johnny Chuck tucked himself away to sleep all winter. Grandfather Frog went deep, deep down in the mud, not to come out again until spring. By and by the little yellow flowers dropped off the little bush, just as the other little flowers in spring had dropped off the other bushes. But they left behind them tiny little packages, one for every little flower that had been on the bush. All winter long these little packages clung to the little bush. In the spring when the little leaves burst forth in all the little bushes, these little packages on the little bush of which I am telling you grew and grew and grew. While the other little bushes had a lot of little flowers as they had had the year before, these little brown packages on the little bush of which I am telling you kept on growing. And they comforted the little bush because it felt that it really had something worth while.

All the summer long the little brown packages grew and grew until they looked like little nuts. When the fall came again and all the little leaves dropped off all the little bushes, and the little bush of which I am telling you was covered with another lot of little yellow flowers and was very happy, then these little brown nuts, one bright autumn day, suddenly popped open! And out of each one flew two brown shiny little seeds. You never saw such a popping and a snapping and a jumping! Pop! pop! snap! snap! hippetty hop! they went, faster than the corn pops in the corn popper. Reddy Fox, who always is suspicious, thought some one was shooting at him. Down on the ground fell the little brown shining seeds and tucked

themselves into the warm earth under the warm leaves, there to stay all winter long.

And when the third spring came with all its little birds and all its little flowers and the warm sunshine, every one of these little brown seeds which had tucked themselves into the warm earth, burst its little brown skin, and up into the sunshine came a little green plant, which would grow and grow and grow, and by and by become just like the little bush I am telling you about.

When the little bush looked down and saw all these little green children popping out of the ground, it was very happy indeed, for it knew that it would no longer be lonely. It no longer felt bad when all the other bushes were covered with flowers, for it knew that by and by when all the other little bushes had lost all their leaves and all their flowers, then would come its turn, and it knew that for a whole year its little brown children would be held safe on its branches.

Now, what do you think is the name of this little bush? Why, it is the witch hazel. And sometime when you fall down and bump yourself hard grandma will go to the medicine closet and will bring out a bottle, and from that bottle she will pour something on that little sore place and it will make it feel better. Do you know what it is? It is the gift of the witch hazel bush to little boys and big men to make them feel better when they are hurt.

CHAPTER XII

WHY BOBBY COON WASHES HIS FOOD

Happy-Go-Lucky Bobby Coon sat on the edge of the Laughing Brook just as round, red Mr. Sun popped up from behind the Purple Hills and Old Mother West Wind turned all her Merry Little Breezes out to romp on the Green Meadows.

Bobby Coon had been out all night. You see Bobby Coon is very apt to get into mischief, and because usually it is safer to get into mischief under cover of the darkness Bobby Coon prefers the night wherein to go abroad. Not that Bobby Coon is really bad! Oh my, no! Everybody likes Bobby Coon. But he can no more keep out of mischief than a duck can keep out of water.

So Bobby Coon sat on the edge of the Laughing Brook and he was very busy, very busy indeed. He was washing his breakfast. Really, it was his dinner, for turning night into day just turns everything topsy-turvy. So Bobby Coon eats dinner when most of the little meadow people are eating breakfast.

This morning he was very busy washing a luscious ear of sweet corn just in the milk. He dipped it in the water and with one little black paw rubbed it thoroughly. Then he looked it over carefully before, with a sigh of contentment, he sat down to put it in his empty little stomach. When he had finished it to the last sweet, juicy

kernel, he ambled sleepily up the Lone Little Path to the big hollow chestnut tree where he lives, and in its great hollow in a soft bed of leaves Bobby Coon curled himself up in a tight little ball to sleep the long, bright day away.

One of the Merry Little Breezes softly followed him. When he had crawled into the hollow chestnut and only his funny, ringed tail hung out, the Merry Little Breezes tweaked it sharply just for fun, and then danced away down the Lone Little Path to join the other Merry Little Breezes around the Smiling Pool.

"Oh! Grandfather Frog," cried a Merry Little Breeze, "tell us why it is that Bobby Coon always washes his food. He never eats it where he gets it or takes it home to his hollow in the big chestnut, but always comes to the Laughing Brook to wash it. None of the other meadow people do that."

Now Great-Grandfather Frog is counted very wise. He is very, very old and he knows the history of all the tribes of little meadow people way back to the time when the frogs ruled the world.

When the Merry Little Breeze asked him why Bobby Coon always washes his food, Grandfather Frog stopped to snap up a particularly fat, foolish, green fly that came his way. Then, while all the Merry Little Breezes gathered around him, he settled himself on his big green lily pad and began:

"Once upon a time, when the world was young, old King Bear ruled in the Green Forest. Of course old Mother Nature, who was even more beautiful then than she is now, was the real ruler, but she let old King Bear think he ruled so long as he ruled wisely.

"All the little Green Forest folk and all the little people of the Green Meadows used to take presents of food to old King Bear, so that he never had to hunt for things to eat. He grew fatter and fatter and fatter until it seemed as if his skin must burst. And the fatter he grew the lazier he grew."

Grandfather Frog paused with an expectant far-away look in his great bulging eyes. Then he leaped into the air so far that when he came down it was with a great splash in the Smiling Pool. But as he swam back to his big lily pad the leg of a foolish green fly could be seen sticking out of one corner of his big mouth, and he settled himself with a sigh of great contentment.

"Old King Bear," continued Grandfather Frog, just as if there had been no interruption, "grew fatter and lazier every day, and like a great many other fat and lazy people who have nothing to do for themselves but are always waited on by others, he grew shorter and shorter in temper and harder and harder to please.

"Now perhaps you don't know it, but the Bear family and the Coon family are very closely related. In fact, they are second cousins. Old Mr. Coon, Bobby Coon's father with a thousand greats tacked on before, was young then, and he was very, very proud of being related to old King Bear. He began to pass some of his old playfellows on the Green Meadows without seeing them. He spent a great deal of time brushing his coat and combing his whiskers and caring for his big ringed tail. He held his head very high and he put on such airs that pretty soon he could see no one at all but members of his own family and of the royal family of Bear.

"Now as old King Bear grew fat and lazy he grew fussy, so that he was no longer content to take everything

brought him, but picked out the choicest portions for himself and left the rest. Mr. Coon took charge of all the things brought as tribute to old King Bear and of course where there were so many goodies left he got all he wanted without working.

"So just as old King Bear had grown fat and lazy and selfish, Mr. Coon grew fat and lazy and selfish. Pretty soon he began to pick out the best things for himself and hide them before old King Bear saw them. When old King Bear was asleep he would go get them and stuff himself like a greedy pig. And because he was stealing and wanted no one to see him he always ate his stolen feasts at night.

"Now old Mother Nature is, as you all know, very, very wise, oh very wise indeed. One of the first laws she made when the world was young is that every living thing shall work for what it has, and the harder it works the stronger it shall grow. So when Old Mother Nature saw how fat and lazy and selfish old King Bear was getting and how fat and lazy and dishonest his cousin, Mr. Coon, was becoming, she determined that they should be taught a lesson which they would remember for ever and ever and ever.

"First she proclaimed that old King Bear should be king no longer, and no more need the little folks of the Green Forest and the little people of the Green Meadows bring him tribute.

"Now when old Mother Nature made this proclamation old King Bear was fast asleep. It was just on the edge of winter and he had picked out a nice warm cave with a great pile of leaves for a bed. Old Mother Nature peeped in at him. He was snoring and probably dreaming of more good things to eat. 'If he is to be king no longer, there is no use in waking him now,' said old Mother

Nature to herself, 'he is so fat and so stupid. He shall sleep until gentle Sister South Wind comes in the spring to kiss away the snow and ice. Then he shall waken with a lean stomach and a great appetite and there shall be none to feed him.'

"Now old Mother Nature always has a warm heart and she was very fond of Bobby Coon's grandfather a thousand times removed. So when she saw what a selfish glutton and thief he had become she decided to put him to sleep just as she had old King Bear. But first she would teach Mr. Coon that stolen food is not the sweetest.

"So old Mother Nature found some tender, juicy corn just in the milk which Mr. Coon had stolen from old King Bear. Then she went down on the Green Meadows where the wild mustard grows and gathering a lot of this she rubbed the juice into the corn and then put it back where Mr. Coon had left it.

"Now I have told you that it was night when Mr. Coon had his stolen feasts, for he wanted no one to see him. So no one was there when he took a great bite of the tender, juicy corn old Mother Nature had put back for him. Being greedy and a glutton, he swallowed the first mouthful before he had fairly tasted it, and took a second, and then such a time as there was on the edge of the Green Forest! Mr. Coon rolled over and over with both of his forepaws clasped over his stomach and groaned and groaned and groaned. He had rubbed his eyes and of course had got mustard into them and could not see. He waked up all the little Green Forest folk who sleep through the night, as good people should, and they all gathered around to see what was the matter with Mr. Coon.

"Finally old Mother Nature came to his relief and brought him some water. Then she led him to his home in the great hollow in the big chestnut tree, and when she had seen him curled up in a tight little ball among the dried leaves she put him into the long sleep as she had old King Bear.

"In the spring, when gentle Sister South Wind kissed away all the snow and ice, old King Bear, who was king no longer, and Mr. Coon awoke and both were very thin, and both were very hungry, oh very, very hungry indeed. Old King Bear, who was king no longer, wasn't the least mite fussy about what he had to eat, but ate gladly any food he could find.

"But Mr. Coon remembered the burning of his stomach and mouth and could not forget it. So whenever he found anything to eat he first took it to the Laughing Brook or the Smiling Pool and washed it very carefully, lest there be some mustard on it.

"And ever since that long ago time, when the world was young, the Coon family has remembered that experience of Mr. Coon, who was second cousin to old King Bear, and that is why Bobby Coon washes his food, travels about at night, and sleeps all winter," concluded Grandfather Frog, fixing his great goggle eyes on a foolish green fly headed his way.

"Oh thank you, thank you, Grandfather Frog," cried the Merry Little Breezes as they danced away over the Green Meadows. But one of them slipped back long enough to get behind the foolish green fly and blow him right up to Grandfather Frog's big lily pad.

"Chug-a-rum," said Grandfather Frog, smacking his lips.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MERRY LITTLE BREEZES HAVE A BUSY DAY

Old Mother West Wind came down from the Purple Hills in the shadowy coolness of the early morning, before even jolly, round, red Mr. Sun had thrown off his rosy coverlids for his daily climb up through the blue sky. The last little star was blinking sleepily as Old Mother West Wind turned her big bag upside down on the Green Meadows and all her children, the Merry Little Breezes, tumbled out on the soft green grass.

Then Old Mother West Wind kissed them all around and hurried away to hunt for a rain cloud which had gone astray. The Merry Little Breezes watched her go. Then they played hide and seek until jolly, round, red Mr. Sun had climbed out of bed and was smiling down on the Green Meadows.

Pretty soon along came Peter Rabbit, lipperty-lipperty-lip.

"Hello, Peter Rabbit!" shouted the Merry Little Breezes. "Come play with us!"

"Can't," said Peter Rabbit. "I have to go find some tender young carrots for my breakfast," and away he hurried, lipperty-lipperty-lip.

In a few minutes Jimmy Skunk came in sight and he seemed to be almost hurrying along the Crooked Little

Path down the hill. The Merry Little Breezes danced over to meet him.

"Hello, Jimmy Skunk!" they cried. "Come play with us!"

Jimmy Skunk shook his head. "Can't," said he. "I have to go look for some beetles for my breakfast," and off he went looking under every old stick and pulling over every stone not too big for his strength.

The Merry Little Breezes watched him for a few minutes and then raced over to the Laughing Brook. There they found Billy Mink stealing softly down towards the Smiling Pool.

"Oh, Billy Mink, come play with us," begged the Merry Little Breezes.

"Can't," said Billy Mink. "I have to catch a trout for Grandfather Mink's breakfast," and he crept on towards the Smiling Pool.

Just then along came Bumble the Bee. Now Bumble the Bee is a lazy fellow who always makes a great fuss, as if he was the busiest and most important fellow in the world.

"Good morning, Bumble," cried the Merry Little Breezes. "Come play with us!"

"Buzz, buzz, buzz," grumbled Bumble the Bee. "Can't, for I have to get a sack of honey," and off he hurried to the nearest dandelion.

Then the Merry Little Breezes hunted up Johnny Chuck. But Johnny Chuck was busy, too busy to play. Bobby Coon was asleep, for he had been out all night. Reddy Fox also was asleep. Striped Chipmunk was in such a hurry to fill the pockets in his cheeks that he could hardly stop to say good morning. Happy Jack Squirrel just flirted

his big tail and rushed away as if he had many important things to attend to.

Finally the Merry Little Breezes gave it up and sat down among the buttercups and daisies to talk it over. Every one seemed to have something to do, every one but themselves. It was such a busy world that sunshiny morning! Pretty soon one of the Merry Little Breezes hopped up very suddenly and began the maddest little dance among the buttercups.

"As we haven't anything to do for ourselves let's do something for somebody else!" he shouted.

Up jumped all the Little Breezes, clapping their hands.

"Oh let's!" they shouted.

Way over across the Green Meadows they could see two long ears above the nodding daisies.

"There's Peter Rabbit," cried one. "Let's help him find those tender young carrots!"

No sooner proposed than off they all raced to see who could reach Peter first. Peter was sitting up very straight, looking this way and looking that way for some tender young carrots, but not one had he found, and his stomach was empty. The Merry Little Breezes stopped just long enough to tickle his long ears and pull his whiskers, then away they raced, scattering in all directions, to see who could first find a tender young carrot for Peter Rabbit. By and by when one of them did find a field of tender young carrots he rushed off, taking the smell of them with him to tickle the nose of Peter Rabbit.

Peter wriggled his nose, his funny little nose, very fast when it was tickled with the smell of tender young carrots, and the Merry Little Breeze laughed to see him.

"Come on, Peter Rabbit, for this is my busy day!" he cried.

Peter Rabbit didn't have to be invited twice. Away he went, lipperty-lipperty-lip, as fast as his long legs could take him after the Merry Little Breeze. And presently they came to the field of tender young carrots.

"Oh thank you, Merry Little Breeze!" cried Peter Rabbit, and straightway began to eat his breakfast.

Another Merry Little Breeze, slipping up the Crooked Little Path on the hill, spied the hind legs of a fat beetle sticking out from under a flat stone. At once the Little Breeze remembered Jimmy Skunk, who was hunting for beetles for his breakfast. Off rushed the Little Breeze in merry whirls that made the grasses sway and bend and the daisies nod.

When after a long, long hunt he found Jimmy Skunk, Jimmy was very much out of sorts. In fact Jimmy Skunk was positively cross. You see, he hadn't had any breakfast, for hunt as he would he couldn't find a single beetle.

When the Merry Little Breeze danced up behind Jimmy Skunk and, just in fun, rumpled up his black and white coat, Jimmy quite lost his temper. In fact he said some things not at all nice to the Merry Little Breeze. But the Merry Little Breeze just laughed. The more he laughed the crosser Jimmy Skunk grew, and the crosser Jimmy Skunk grew the more the Merry Little Breeze laughed. It was such a jolly laugh that pretty soon Jimmy Skunk began to grin a little sheepishly, then to really smile and finally to laugh outright in spite of his empty stomach. You see it is very hard, very hard indeed and very foolish, to remain cross when someone else is perfectly good natured.

Suddenly the Merry Little Breeze danced up to Jimmy Skunk and whispered in his right ear. Then he danced around and whispered in his left ear. Jimmy Skunk's eyes snapped and his mouth began to water.

"Where, Little Breeze, where?" he begged.

"Follow me," cried the Merry Little Breeze, racing off up the Crooked Little Path so fast that Jimmy Skunk lost his breath trying to keep up, for you know Jimmy Skunk seldom hurries.

When they came to the big flat stone Jimmy Skunk grasped it with both hands and pulled and pulled. Up came the stone so suddenly that Jimmy Skunk fell over flat on his back. When he had scrambled to his feet there were beetles and beetles, running in every direction to find a place to hide.

"Thank you, thank you, Little Breeze," shouted Jimmy Skunk as he started to catch beetles for his breakfast.

And the Little Breeze laughed happily as he danced away to join the other Merry Little Breezes on the Green Meadows. There he found them very, very busy, very busy indeed, so busy that they could hardly find time to nod to him. What do you think they were doing? They were toting gold! Yes, Sir, toting gold! And this is how it happened:

While the first Little Breeze was showing Peter Rabbit the field of tender young carrots, and while the second Little Breeze was leading Jimmy Skunk to the flat stone and the beetles, the other Merry Little Breezes had found Bumble the Bee. Now Bumble the Bee is a lazy fellow, though he pretends to be the busiest fellow in the world, and they found him grumbling as he buzzed with a great deal of fuss from one flower to another.

"What's the matter, Bumble?" cried the Merry Little Breezes.

"Matter enough," grumbled Bumble the Bee. "I've got to make a sack of honey, and as if that isn't enough, old Mother Nature has ordered me to carry a sack of gold from each flower I visit to the next flower I visit. If I don't I can get no honey. Buzz-buzz-buzz," grumbled Bumble the Bee.

The Merry Little Breezes looked at the million little flowers on the Green Meadows, each waiting a sack of gold to give and a sack of gold to receive. Then they looked at each other and shouted happily, for they too would now be able to cry "busy, busy, busy."

From flower to flower they hurried, each with a bag of gold over his shoulder. Wherever they left a bag they took a bag, and all the little flowers nodded happily to see the Merry Little Breezes at work.

Jolly, round, red Mr. Sun climbed higher and higher and higher in the blue sky, where he can look down and see all things, great and small. His smile was broader than ever as he watched the hurrying, scurrying Little Breezes working instead of playing. Yet after all it was a kind of play, for they danced from flower to flower and ran races across bare places where no flowers grew.

By and by the Merry Little Breezes met Peter Rabbit. Now Peter Rabbit had made a good breakfast of tender young carrots, so he felt very good, very good indeed.

"Hi!" shouted Peter Rabbit, "come play with me."

"Can't," cried the Merry Little Breezes all together, "we have work to do!"

Off they hurried, while Peter Rabbit stretched himself out full length in a sunny spot, for Peter Rabbit also is a lazy fellow.

Down the Crooked Little Path onto the Green Meadows came Jimmy Skunk.

"Ho!" shouted Jimmy Skunk as soon as he saw the Little Breezes, "come play with me."

"Can't," cried the Little Breezes, "for we are busy, busy, busy," and they laughed happily.

When they reached the Laughing Brook they found Billy Mink curled up in a round ball, fast asleep. It isn't often that Billy Mink is caught napping, but he had had a good breakfast of trout, he had found no one to play with and, as he never works and the day was so bright and warm, he had first looked for a place where he thought no one would find him and had then curled himself up to sleep, One of the Little Breezes laid down the bag of gold he was carrying and creeping ever so softly over to Billy Mink began to tickle one of Billy's ears with a straw.

At first Billy Mink didn't open his eyes, but rubbed his ear with a little black hand. Finally he jumped to his feet wide awake and ready to fight whoever was bothering him. But all he saw was a laughing Little Breeze running away with a bag of gold on his back.

So all day long, till Old Mother West Wind came with her big bag to carry them to their home behind the Purple Hills, the Merry Little Breezes hurried this way and that way over the Green Meadows. No wee flower was too tiny to give and receive its share of gold, and not one was overlooked by the Merry Little Breezes.

Old Mother Nature, who knows everything, heard of the busy day of the Merry Little Breezes. Nobody knows how she heard of it. Perhaps jolly, round, red Mr. Sun told her. Perhaps—but never mind. You can't fool old Mother Nature anyway and it's of no use to try.

So old Mother Nature visited the Green Meadows to see for herself, and when she found how the Merry Little Breezes had distributed the gold she was so pleased that straightway she announced to all the world that thenceforth and for all time the Merry Little Breezes of Old Mother West Wind should have charge of the distribution of the gold of the flowers on the Green Meadows, which they have to this day.

And since that day the Merry Little Breezes have been merrier than ever, for they have found that it is not nearly so much fun to play all the time, but that to work for some good in the world is the greatest fun of all.

So every year when the gold of the flowers, which some people do not know is gold at all but call pollen, is ready you will find the Merry Little Breezes of Old Mother West Wind very, very busy among the flowers on the Green Meadows. And this is the happiest time of all.

CHAPTER XIV

WHY HOOTY THE OWL DOES NOT PLAY ON THE GREEN MEADOWS

The Merry Little Breezes of Old Mother West Wind were having a good-night game of tag down on the Green Meadows. They were having such a jolly time while they waited for Old Mother West Wind and her big bag to take them to their home behind the Purple Hills. Jolly, round, red Mr. Sun had already put his nightcap on. Black shadows crept softly out from the Purple Hills onto the Green Meadows. The Merry Little Breezes grew sleepy, almost too sleepy to play, for Old Mother West Wind was very, very late.

Farther and farther and farther out onto the Green Meadows crept the black shadows. Suddenly one seemed to separate from the others. Softly, oh so softly, yet swiftly, it floated over towards the Merry Little Breezes. One of them happened to look up and saw it coming. It was the same Little Breeze who one time stayed out all night. When he looked up and saw this seeming shadow moving so swiftly he knew that it was no shadow at all.

"Here comes Hooty the Owl," cried the Little Breeze.

Then all the Merry Little Breezes stopped their game of tag to look at Hooty the Owl. It is seldom they have a chance to see him, for usually Hooty the Owl does not come out on the Green Meadows until after the Merry

Little Breezes are snugly tucked in bed behind the Purple Hills.

"Perhaps Hooty the Owl will tell us why it is that he never comes out to play with us," said one of the Little Breezes.

But just as Hooty the Owl floated over to them up came Old Mother West Wind, and she was in a great hurry, for she was late, and she was tired. She had had a busy day, a very busy day indeed, hunting for a rain cloud which had gone astray. So now she just opened her big bag and tumbled all the Merry Little Breezes into it as fast as she could without giving them so much as a chance to say "Good evening" to Hooty the Owl. Then she took them off home behind the Purple Hills.

Of course the Merry Little Breezes were disappointed, very much disappointed. But they were also very sleepy, for they had played hard all day.

"Never mind," said one of them, drowsily, "to-morrow we'll ask Great-Grandfather Frog why it is that Hooty the Owl never comes out to play with us on the Green Meadows. He'll know."

The next morning Old Mother West Wind was late in coming down from the Purple Hills. When she finally did turn the Merry Little Breezes out of her big bag onto the Green Meadows jolly, round, red Mr. Sun was already quite high in the blue sky. The Merry Little Breezes waited just long enough to say "Good-by" to Old Mother West Wind, and then started a mad race to see who could reach the Smiling Pool first.

There they found Great-Grandfather Frog sitting on his big green lily pad as usual. He was very contented with the world, was Grandfather Frog, for fat green flies had

been more foolish than usual that morning and already he had all that he could safely tuck inside his white and yellow waistcoat.

"Good morning, Grandfather Frog," shouted the Merry Little Breezes. "Will you tell us why it is that Hooty the Owl never comes out to play with us on the Green Meadows?"

"Chug-a-rum," said Great-Grandfather Frog, gruffly, "how should I know?"

You see, Grandfather Frog likes to be teased a little.

"Oh, but you do know, for you are so old and so very wise," cried the Merry Little Breezes all together.

Grandfather Frog smiled, for he likes to be thought very wise, and also he was feeling very good, very good indeed that morning.

"Chug-a-rum," said Grandfather Frog. "If you'll sit perfectly still I'll tell you what I know about Hooty the Owl. But remember, you must sit perfectly still, per-fect-ly still."

The Merry Little Breezes sighed, for it is the hardest thing in the world for them to keep perfectly still unless they are asleep. But they promised that they would, and when they had settled down, each one in the heart of a great white water lily, Grandfather Frog began:

"Once upon a time, when the world was young, Hooty the Owl's grandfather a thousand times removed used to fly about in daylight with the other birds. He was very big and very strong and very fierce, was Mr. Owl. He had great big claws and a hooked bill, just as Hooty the Owl has now, and he was afraid of nothing and nobody.

"Now when people are very big and very strong and afraid of nothing and nobody they are very apt to care for

nothing and nobody but themselves. So it was with Mr. Owl. Whatever he saw that he wanted he took, no matter to whom it belonged, for there was no one to stop him.

"As I have already told you, Mr. Owl was very big and very strong and very fierce and he was a very great glutton. It took a great many little birds and little animals to satisfy his appetite. But he didn't stop there! No, Sir, he didn't stop there! He used to kill harmless little meadow people just for the fun of killing, and because he could. Every day he grew more savage. Finally no one smaller than himself dared stir on the Green Meadows when he was around. The little birds no longer sang. The Fieldmice children no longer played among the meadow grasses. Those were sad days, very sad days indeed on the Green Meadows," said Grandfather Frog, with a sigh.

"At last old Mother Nature came to visit the Green Meadows and she soon saw what a terrible state things were in. No one came to meet her, for you see no one dared to show himself for fear of fierce old Mr. Owl.

"Now I have told you that Mr. Owl was afraid of nothing and nobody, but this is not quite true, for he was afraid, very much afraid of old Mother Nature. When he saw her coming he was sitting on top of a tall dead stump and he at once tried to look very meek and very innocent.

"Old Mother Nature wasted no time. 'Where are all my little meadow people and why do they not come to give me greeting?' demanded old Mother Nature of Mr. Owl.

"Mr. Owl bowed very low. 'I'm sure I don't know. I think they must all be taking a nap,' said he.

"Now you can't fool old Mother Nature and it's of no use to try. No, Sir, you can't fool old Mother Nature. She just looked at Mr. Owl and she looked at the feathers and

fur scattered about the foot of the dead stump. Mr. Owl stood first on one foot and then on the other. He tried to look old Mother Nature in the face, but he couldn't. You see, Mr. Owl had a guilty conscience and a guilty conscience never looks anyone straight in the face. He did wish that Mother Nature would say something, did Mr. Owl. But she didn't. She just looked and looked and looked and looked straight at Mr. Owl. The longer she looked the uneasier he got and the faster he shifted from one foot to the other. Finally he shifted so fast that he seemed to be dancing on top of the old stump.

"Gradually, a few at a time, the little meadow people crept out from their hiding places and formed a great circle around the old dead stump. With old Mother Nature there they felt sure that no harm could come to them. Then they began to laugh at the funny sight of fierce old Mr. Owl hopping from one foot to the other on top of the old dead stump. It was the first laugh on the Green Meadows for a long, long, long time.

"Of course Mr. Owl saw them laughing at him, but he could think of nothing but the sharp eyes of old Mother Nature boring straight through him, and he danced faster than ever. The faster he danced the funnier he looked, and the funnier he looked the harder the little meadow people laughed.

"Finally old Mother Nature slowly raised a hand and pointed a long forefinger at Mr. Owl. All the little meadow people stopped laughing to hear what she would say.

"'Mr. Owl,' she began, 'I know and you know why none of my little meadow people were here to give me greeting. And this shall be your punishment: From now on your eyes shall become so tender that they cannot stand

the light of day, so that hereafter you shall fly about only after round, red Mr. Sun has gone to bed behind the Purple Hills. No more shall my little people who play on the Green Meadows all the day long have cause to fear you, for no more shall you see to do them harm.'

"When she ceased speaking all the little meadow people gave a great shout, for they knew that it would be even as Mother Nature had said. Then began such a frolic as the Green Meadows had not known for many a long day.

"But Mr. Owl flew slowly and with difficulty over to the darkest part of the deep wood, for the light hurt his eyes dreadfully and he could hardly see. And as he flew the little birds flew around him in a great cloud and plucked out his feathers and tormented him for he could not see to harm them."

Grandfather Frog paused and looked dreamily across the Smiling Pool. Suddenly he opened his big mouth and then closed it with a snap. One more foolish green fly had disappeared inside the white and yellow waistcoat.

"Chug-a-rum," said Grandfather Frog, "those were sad days, sad days indeed for Mr. Owl. He couldn't hunt for his meals by day, for the light blinded him. At night he could see but little in the darkness. So he got little to eat and he grew thinner and thinner and thinner until he was but a shadow of his former self. He was always hungry, was Mr. Owl, always hungry. No one was afraid of him now, for it was the easiest thing in the world to keep out of his way.

"At last old Mother Nature came again to visit the Green Meadows and the Green Forest. Far, far in the darkest part of the deep wood she found Mr. Owl. When

she saw how very thin and how very, very miserable he was her heart was moved to pity, for old Mother Nature loves all her subjects, even the worst of them. All the fierceness was gone from Mr. Owl. He was so weak that he just sat huddled in the thickest part of the great pine. You see he had been able to catch very little to eat.

"'Mr. Owl,' said old Mother Nature gently, 'you now know something of the misery and the suffering which you have caused others, and I think you have been punished enough. No more may you fly abroad over the Green Meadows while the day is bright, for still is the fear of you in the hearts of all my little meadow people, but hereafter you shall not find it so difficult to get enough to eat. Your eyes shall grow big, bigger than the eyes of any other bird, so that you shall be able to see in the dusk and even in the dark. Your ears shall grow large, larger than the ears of any of the little forest or meadow people, so that you can hear the very least sound. Your feathers shall become as soft as down, so that when you fly none shall hear you.'

"And from that day it was even so. Mr. Owl's eyes grew big and bigger until he could see as well in the dusk as he used to see in the full light of day. His ears grew large and larger until his hearing became so keen that he could hear the least rustle, even at a long distance. And when he flew he made no sound, but floated like a great shadow.

"The little meadow people no longer feared him by day, but when the shadows began to creep out from the Purple Hills each night and they heard his voice 'Whoo-too-whoo-hoo-hoo' they felt all the old fear of him. If they were wise they did not stir, but if they were foolish and so much as shivered Mr. Owl was sure to hear them and silently pounce upon them.

"So once more Mr. Owl grew strong and fierce. But only at night had anyone cause to fear him, and then only the foolish and timid.

"And now you know," concluded Grandfather Frog, "why it is that Hooty the Owl never comes out to play with you on the Green Meadows, and why his eyes are so big and his ears so large."

"Thank you, thank you, Grandfather Frog!" cried the Merry Little Breezes, springing up from the white water lilies and stretching themselves. "We'll bring you the first foolish green fly we can find."

Then away they rushed to hunt for it.

CHAPTER XV

DANNY MEADOW MOUSE LEARNS TO LAUGH

Danny Meadow Mouse sat on his doorstep and sulked. The Merry Little Breezes of Old Mother West Wind ran past, one after another, and pointing their fingers at him cried:

"Fie, Danny Meadow Mouse!
Better go inside the house!
Babies cry—oh my! oh my!
You're a baby—go and cry!"

Pretty soon along the Lone Little Path came Peter Rabbit. Peter Rabbit looked at Danny Meadow Mouse. Then he pointed a finger at him and said:

"Cry, Danny, cry!
Mammy'll whip you by and by!
Then we'll all come 'round to see
How big a baby you can be.
Cry, Danny, cry!"

Danny Meadow Mouse began to snivel. He cried softly to himself as Peter Rabbit hopped off down the Lone Little Path. Soon along came Reddy Fox. He saw Danny Meadow Mouse sitting on his doorstep crying all by himself. Reddy

Fox crept up behind a tall bunch of grass. Then suddenly he jumped out right in front of Danny Meadow Mouse.

"Boo!" cried Reddy Fox.

It frightened Danny Meadow Mouse. He jumped almost out of his skin, and ran into the house crying at the top of his voice.

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Reddy Fox

"Danny, Danny, crying Dan
Boo-hoo-hooed and off he ran!"

Then Reddy Fox chased his tail all the way down the Lone Little Path onto the Green Meadows.

By and by Danny Meadow Mouse came out again and sat on his doorstep. He had stopped crying, but he looked very unhappy and cross and sulky. Hopping and skipping down the Lone Little Path came Striped Chipmunk.

"Come play with me," called Danny Meadow Mouse.

Striped Chipmunk kept right on hopping and skipping down the Lone Little Path.

"Don't want to," said Striped Chipmunk, sticking his tongue in his cheek.

"Cry-baby Danny
Never'll be a manny!
Run to mamma, Danny, dear,
And she will wipe away your tear!"

Striped Chipmunk hopped and skipped out of sight, and Danny Meadow Mouse began to cry again because Striped Chipmunk would not play with him.

It was true, dreadfully true! Danny Meadow Mouse was a cry-baby and no one wanted to play with him. If he stubbed his toe he cried. If Striped Chipmunk beat him in

a race he cried. If the Merry Little Breezes pulled his whiskers just in fun he cried. It had come to such a pass that all the little meadow people delighted to tease him just to make him cry. Nowhere on all the Green Meadows was there such a cry-baby as Danny Meadow Mouse.

So Danny sat on his doorstep and cried because no one would play with him and he was lonely. The more he thought how lonely he was, the more he cried.

Presently along came old Mr. Toad. Now Mr. Toad looks very grumpy and out of sorts, but that is because you do not know old Mr. Toad. When he reached the house of Danny Meadow Mouse he stopped right in front of Danny. He put his right hand behind his right ear and listened. Then he put his left hand behind his left ear and listened some more. Finally he put both hands on his hips and began to laugh.

Now Mr. Toad's mouth is very big indeed, and when he opens it to laugh he opens it very wide indeed.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Toad.

Danny Meadow Mouse cried harder than ever, and the harder he cried the harder old Mr. Toad laughed. By and by Danny Meadow Mouse stopped crying long enough to say to Mr. Toad:

"What are you laughing for, Mr. Toad?"

Mr. Toad stopped laughing long enough to reply:

"I'm laughing, Danny Meadow Mouse, because you are crying at me. What are you crying for?"

"I'm crying," said Danny Meadow Mouse, "because you are laughing at me." Then Danny began to cry again, and Mr. Toad began to laugh again.

"What's all this about?" demanded some one right behind them.

It was Jimmy Skunk.

"It's a new kind of game," said old Mr. Toad. "Danny Meadow Mouse is trying to see if he can cry longer than I can laugh."

Then old Mr. Toad once more opened his big mouth and began to laugh harder than ever. Jimmy Skunk looked at him for just a minute and he looked so funny that Jimmy Skunk began to laugh too.

Now a good honest laugh is like whooping cough—it is catching. The first thing Danny Meadow Mouse knew his tears would not come. It's a fact, Danny Meadow Mouse had run short of tears. The next thing he knew he wasn't crying at all—he was laughing. Yes, Sir, he actually was laughing. He tried to cry, but it was of no use at all; he just had to laugh.

The more he laughed the harder old Mr. Toad laughed. And the harder Mr. Toad laughed the funnier he looked. Pretty soon all three of them, Danny Meadow Mouse, old Mr. Toad and Jimmy Skunk, were holding their sides and rolling over and over in the grass, they were laughing so hard.

By and by Mr. Toad stopped laughing.

"Dear me, dear me, this will never do!" said Mr. Toad. "I must get busy in my garden.

"The little slugs, they creep and crawl
And eat and eat from spring to fall
They never stop to laugh nor cry,
And really couldn't if they'd try.

So if you'll excuse me I'll hurry along to get them out of my garden."

Mr. Toad started down the Lone Little Path. After a few hops he paused and turned around.

"Danny Meadow Mouse," said old Mr. Toad, "an honest laugh is like sunshine; it brightens the whole world. Don't forget it."

Jimmy Skunk remembered that he had started out to find some beetles, so still chuckling he started for the Crooked Little Path up the hill. Danny Meadow Mouse, once more alone, sat down on his doorstep. His sides were sore, he had laughed so hard, and somehow the whole world had changed. The grass seemed greener than he had ever seen it before. The sunshine was brighter and the songs of the birds were sweeter. Altogether it was a very nice world, a very nice world indeed to live in. Somehow he felt as if he never wanted to cry again.

Pretty soon along came the Merry Little Breezes again, chasing butterflies. When they saw Danny Meadow Mouse sitting on his doorstep they pointed their fingers at him, just as before, and shouted:

"Fie, Danny Meadow Mouse!
Better go inside the house!
Babies cry—oh my! oh my!
You're a baby—go and cry!"

For just a little minute Danny Meadow Mouse wanted to cry. Then he remembered old Mr. Toad and instead began to laugh.

The Merry Little Breezes didn't know just what to make of it. They stopped chasing butterflies and crowded around Danny Meadow Mouse. They began to tease him.

They pulled his whiskers and rumpled his hair. The more they teased the more Danny Meadow Mouse laughed.

When they found that Danny Meadow Mouse really wasn't going to cry, they stopped teasing and invited him to come play with them in the long meadow grass. Such a good frolic as they did have! When it was over Danny Meadow Mouse once more sat down on his doorstep to rest.

Hopping and skipping back up the Lone Little Path came Striped Chipmunk. When he saw Danny Meadow Mouse he stuck his tongue in his cheek and cried:

"Cry-baby Danny
Never'll be a manny!
Run to mamma, Danny dear,
And she will wipe away your tear!"

Instead of crying Danny Meadow Mouse began to laugh. Striped Chipmunk stopped and took his tongue out of his cheek. Then he began to laugh too.

"Do you want me to play with you?" asked Striped Chipmunk, suddenly.

Of course Danny did, and soon they were having the merriest kind of a game of hide and seek. Right in the midst of it Danny Meadow Mouse caught his left foot in a root and twisted his ankle. My, how it did hurt! In spite of himself tears did come into his eyes. But he winked them back and bravely began to laugh.

Striped Chipmunk helped him back to his doorstep and cut funny capers while Mother Meadow Mouse bound up the hurt foot, and all the time Danny Meadow Mouse

laughed until pretty soon he forgot that his foot ached at all.

When Peter Rabbit came jumping along up the Lone Little Path he began to shout as soon as he saw Danny Meadow Mouse:

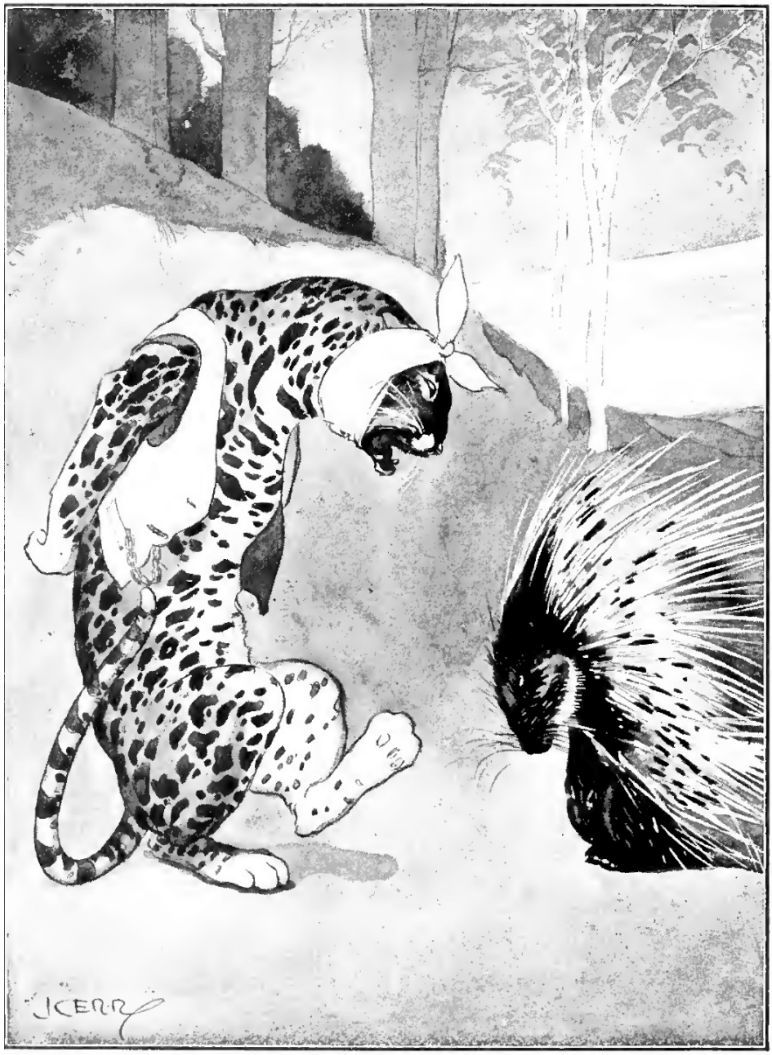
"Cry, Danny, cry!
Mammy'll whip you by and by!
Then we'll all come 'round to see
How big a baby you can be.
Cry, Danny, cry!"

But Danny didn't cry. My, no! He laughed instead. Peter Rabbit was so surprised that he stopped to see what had come over Danny Meadow Mouse. When he saw the bandaged foot and heard how Danny had twisted his ankle Peter Rabbit sat right down on the doorstep beside Danny Meadow Mouse and told him how sorry he was, for happy-go-lucky Peter Rabbit is very tender-hearted. Then he told Danny all about the wonderful things he had seen in his travels, and of all the scrapes he had gotten into. When Peter Rabbit finally started off home Danny Meadow Mouse still sat on his doorstep. But no longer was he lonely. He watched Old Mother West Wind trying to gather her Merry Little Breezes into her big bag to take to their home behind the Purple Hills, and he laughed right out when he saw her catch the last mischievous Little Breeze and tumble him, heels over head, in with the others.

"Old Mr. Toad was right, just exactly right," thought Danny Meadow Mouse, as he rocked to and fro on his

doorstep. "It is much better, oh very much better, to laugh than to cry."

And since that day when Danny Meadow Mouse learned to laugh, no one has had a chance to point a finger at him and call him a cry-baby. Instead every one has learned to love merry little Danny Meadow Mouse, and now they call him "Laughing Dan."



Suddenly he met Mr. Panther.

MOTHER WEST WIND'S ANIMAL FRIENDS

BY THORNTON W. BURGESS
Illustrated by George Kerr

CHAPTER I

THE MERRY LITTLE BREEZES SAVE THE GREEN MEADOWS

Old Mother West Wind's family is very big, very big indeed. There are dozens and dozens of Merry Little Breezes, all children of Old Mother West Wind. Every morning she comes down from the Purple Hills and tumbles them out of a great bag on to the Green Meadows. Every night she gathers them into the great bag and, putting it over her shoulder, takes them to their home behind the Purple Hills.

One morning, just as usual, Old Mother West Wind turned the Merry Little Breezes out to play on the Green Meadows. Then she hurried away to fill the sails of the ships and blow them across the great ocean. The Merry Little Breezes hopped and skipped over the Green Meadows looking for some one to play with. It was then that one of them discovered something—something very dreadful.

It was a fire! Yes, Sir, it was a fire in the meadow grass! Some one had dropped a lighted match, and now little red flames were running through the grass in all directions. The Merry Little Breeze hastened to tell all the other Little Breezes and all rushed over as fast as they could to see for themselves.

They saw how the little red flames were turning to smoke and ashes everything they touched, and how black

and ugly, with nothing alive there, became that part of the Green Meadows where the little flames ran. It was dreadful! Then one of them noticed that the little red flames were running in the direction of Johnny Chuck's new house. Would the little red flames burn up Johnny Chuck, as they burned up the grass and the flowers?

"Hi!" cried the Merry Little Breeze, "We must warn Johnny Chuck and all the other little meadow people!"

So he caught up a capful of smoke and raced off as fast as he could go to Johnny Chuck's house. Then each of the Merry Little Breezes caught up a capful of smoke and started to warn one of the little meadow people or forest folks.

So pretty soon jolly, round, red Mr. Sun, looking down from the blue sky, saw Johnny Chuck, Jimmy Skunk, Peter Rabbit, Striped Chipmunk, Danny Meadow Mouse, Reddy Fox, Bobby Coon, Happy Jack Squirrel, Chatterer the Red Squirrel, Jumper the Hare and old Mr. Toad all hurrying as fast as they could to the Smiling Pool where live Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter and Jerry Muskrat and Spotty the Turtle and Great-Grandfather Frog. There they would be quite safe from the little red flames.

"Oh," gasped Johnny Chuck, puffing very hard, for you know he is round and fat and roly-poly and it was hard work for him to run, "what will become of my nice new house and what will there be left to eat?"

The Merry Little Breeze who had brought him the warning in a capful of smoke thought for a minute. Then he called all the other Little Breezes to him.

"We must get Farmer Brown's help or we will have no beautiful Green Meadows to play on," said the Merry Little Breeze.

So together they rushed back to where the little red flames had grown into great, angry, red flames that were licking up everything in their way. The Merry Little Breezes gathered a great cloud of smoke and, lifting all together, they carried it over and dropped it in Farmer Brown's dooryard. Then one of them blew a little of the smoke in at an open window, near which Farmer Brown was eating breakfast. Farmer Brown coughed and strangled and sprang from his chair.

"Phew!" cried Farmer Brown, "I smell smoke! There must be a fire on the meadows."

Then he shouted for his boy and for his hired man and the three, with shovels in their hands, started for the Green Meadows to try to put the fire out.

The Merry Little Breezes sighed with relief and followed to the fire. But when they saw how fierce and angry the red flames had become they knew that Farmer Brown and his boy and his hired man would not be able to put the fire out. Choking with smoke, they hurried over to tell the dreadful news to the little meadow people and forest folks gathered at the Smiling Pool.

"Chug-a-rum! Why don't you help put the fire out?" asked Grandfather Frog.

"We warned Farmer Brown and his boy and his hired man; what more can we do?" asked one of the Merry Little Breezes.

"Go find and drive up a rain cloud," replied Grandfather Frog.

"Splendid!" cried all the little meadow people and forest folks. "Hurry! hurry! Oh, do hurry!"

So the Merry Little Breezes scattered in all directions to hunt for a rain cloud.

"It is a good thing that Old Mother West Wind has such a big family," said Grandfather Frog, "for one of them is sure to find a wandering rain cloud some where."

Then all the little meadow people and forest folks sat down around the Smiling Pool to wait. They watched the smoke roll up until it hid the face of jolly, round, red Mr. Sun. Their hearts almost stood still with fear as they saw the fierce, angry, red flames leap into the air and climb tall trees on the edge of the Green Forest.

Splash! Something struck in the Smiling Pool right beside Grandfather Frog's big, green, lily-pad.

Spat! Something hit Johnny Chuck right on the end of his funny little, black nose.

They were drops of water.

"Hurrah!" cried Johnny Chuck, whirling about. Sure enough, they were drops of water rain drops. And there, coming just as fast as the Merry Little Breezes could push it, and they were pushing very hard, very hard indeed, was a great, black, rain cloud, spilling down rain as it came.

When it was just over the fire, the great, black, rain cloud split wide open, and the water poured down so that the fierce, angry, red flames were drowned in a few minutes.

"Phew!" said Farmer Brown, mopping his face with his handkerchief, "that was warm work! That shower came up just in time and it is lucky it did."

But you know and I know and all the little meadow people and forest folks know that it wasn't luck at all, but the quick work and hard work of Old Mother West Wind's big family of Merry Little Breezes, which saved the Green Meadows. And this, too, is one reason why Peter Rabbit and Johnny Chuck and Bobby Coon and all the

other little meadow and forest people love the Merry Little Breezes who play every day on the Green Meadows.

CHAPTER II

THE STRANGER IN THE GREEN FOREST

Old Mother West Wind, hurrying down from the Purple Hills with her Merry Little Breezes, discovered the newcomer in the Green Forest on the edge of the Green Meadows. Of course the Merry Little Breezes saw him, too, and as soon as Old Mother West Wind had turned them loose on the Green Meadows they started out to spread the news.

As they hurried along the Crooked Little Path up the hill, they met Reddy Fox.

"Oh, Reddy Fox," cried the Merry Little Breezes, so excited that all talked together, "there's a stranger in the Green Forest!"

Reddy Fox sat down and grinned at the Merry Little Breezes. The grin of Reddy Fox is not pleasant. It irritates and exasperates. It made the Merry Little Breezes feel very uncomfortable.

"You don't say so," drawled Reddy Fox. "Do you mean to say that you've just discovered him? Why, your news is so old that it is stale; it is no news at all. I thought you had something really new to tell me."

The Merry Little Breezes were disappointed. Their faces fell. They had thought it would be such fun to carry the news through the Green Forest and over the Green

Meadows, and now the very first one they met knew all about it.

"Who is he, Reddy Fox?" asked one of the Merry Little Breezes.

Reddy Fox pretended not to hear.

"I must be going," said he, rising and stretching. "I have an engagement with Billy Mink down at the Smiling Pool."

Reddy Fox started down the Crooked Little Path while the Merry Little Breezes hurried up the Crooked Little Path to tell the news to Jimmy Skunk, who was looking for beetles for his breakfast.

Now Ready Fox had not told the truth. He had known nothing whatever of the stranger in the Green Forest. In fact he had been as surprised as the Merry Little Breezes could have wished, but he would not show it. And he had told another untruth, for he had no intention of going down to the Smiling Pool. No, indeed! He just waited until the Merry Little Breezes were out of sight, then he slipped into the Green Forest to look for the stranger seen by the Merry Little Breezes.

Now Reddy Fox does nothing openly. Instead of walking through the Green Forest like a gentleman, he sneaked along under the bushes and crept from tree to tree, all the time looking for the stranger of whom the Merry Little Breezes had told him. All around through the Green Forest sneaked Reddy Fox, but nothing of the stranger could he see. It didn't occur to him to look anywhere but on the ground.

"I don't believe there is a stranger here," said Reddy to himself.

Just then he noticed some scraps of bark around the foot of a tall maple. Looking up to see where it came from he saw what do you think? Why, the stranger who had come to the Green Forest. Reddy Fox dodged back out of sight, for he wanted to find out all he could about the stranger before the stranger saw him.

Reddy sat down behind a big stump and rubbed his eyes. He could hardly believe what he saw There at the top of the tall maple, stripping the branches of their bark and eating it, was the stranger, sure enough. He was big, much bigger than Reddy. Could he be a relative of Happy Jack Squirrel? He didn't look a bit, not the least little bit like Happy Jack. And he moved slowly, very slowly, indeed, while Happy Jack and his cousins move quickly. Reddy decided that the stranger could not be related to Happy Jack.

The longer Reddy looked the more he was puzzled. Also, Reddy began to feel just a little bit jealous. You see all the little meadow people and forest folks are afraid of Reddy Fox, but this stranger was so big that Reddy began to feel something very like fear in his own heart.

The Merry Little Breezes had told the news to Jimmy Skunk and then hurried over the Green Meadows telling every one they met of the stranger in the Green Forest Billy Mink, Little Joe Otter, Johnny Chuck, Peter Rabbit, Happy Jack Squirrel, Danny Meadow Mouse, Striped Chipmunk, old Mr. Toad, Great-Grandfather Frog, Sammy Jay, Blacky the Crow, and each as soon as he heard the news started for the Green Forest to welcome the newcomer. Even Great-Grandfather Frog left his beloved big, green lily pad and started for the Green Forest.



Reddy strutted out in front of him. “Who are you?” he demanded.

So it was that when finally the stranger decided that he had eaten enough bark for his breakfast, and climbed slowly down the tall maple, he found all the little meadow people and forest folks sitting in a big circle waiting for him. The stranger was anything but handsome, but his size filled them with respect. The nearer he got to the ground the bigger he looked. Down he came, and Reddy Fox, noting how slow and clumsy in his movements was the stranger, decided that there was nothing to fear.

If the stranger was slow and clumsy in the tree, he was clumsier still on the ground. His eyes were small and dull. His coat was rough, long and almost black. His legs were short and stout. His tail was rather short and broad. Altogether he was anything but handsome. But when the little meadow people and forest folks saw his huge front teeth they regarded him with greater respect than ever, all but Reddy Fox.

Reddy strutted out in front of him. "Who are you?" he demanded.

The stranger paid no attention to Reddy Fox.

"What business have you in our Green Forest?" demanded Reddy, showing all his teeth.

The stranger just grunted and appeared not to see Reddy Fox. Reddy swelled himself out until every hair stood on end and he looked twice as big as he really is. He strutted back and forth in front of the stranger.

"Don't you know that I'm afraid of nothing and nobody?" snarled Reddy Fox.

The stranger refused to give him so much as a glance. He just grunted and kept right on about his business. All the little meadow people and forest folks began to giggle and then to laugh. Reddy knew that they were laughing at

him and he grew very angry, for no one likes to be laughed at, least of all Reddy Fox.

"You're a pig!" taunted Reddy. "You're afraid to fight. I bet you're afraid of Danny Meadow Mouse!"

Still the stranger just grunted and paid no further attention to Reddy Fox.

Now, with all his boasting Reddy Fox had kept at a safe distance from the stranger. Happy Jack Squirrel had noticed this. "If you're so brave, why don't you drive him out, Reddy Fox?" asked Happy Jack, skipping behind a tree. "You don't dare to!"

Reddy turned and glared at Happy Jack. "I'm not afraid!" he shouted. "I'm not afraid of anything nor anybody!"

But though he spoke so bravely it was noticed that he went no nearer the stranger.

Now it happened that that morning Bowser the Hound took it into his head to take a walk in the Green Forest.

Blacky the Crow, sitting on the tip-top of a big pine, was the first to see him coming. From pure love of mischief Blacky waited until Bowser was close to the circle around the stranger. Then he gave the alarm.

"Here's Bowser the Hound! Run!" screamed Blacky the Crow. Then he laughed so that he had to hold his sides to see the fright down below. Reddy Fox forgot that he was afraid of nothing and nobody. He was the first one out of sight, running so fast that his feet seemed hardly to touch the ground. Peter Rabbit turned a back somersault and suddenly remembered that he had important business down on the Green Meadows. Johnny Chuck dodged into

a convenient hole. Billy Mink ran into a hollow tree. Striped Chipmunk hid in an old stump.

Happy Jack Squirrel climbed the nearest tree. In a twinkling the stranger was alone, facing Bowser the Hound.

Bowser stopped and looked at the stranger in sheer surprise. Then the hair on the back of his neck stood on end and he growled a deep, ugly growl. Still the stranger did not run. Bowser didn't know just what to make of it. Never before had he had such an experience. Could it be that the stranger was not afraid of him? Bowser walked around the stranger, growling fiercely. As he walked the stranger turned, so as always to face him. It was perplexing and very provoking. It really seemed as if the stranger had no fear of him.

"Bow, wow, wow!" cried Bowser the Hound in his deepest voice, and sprang at the stranger.

Then something happened, so surprising that Blacky the Crow lost his balance on the top of the pine where he was watching. The instant that Bowser sprang, the stranger rolled himself into a tight round ball and out of the long hair of his coat sprang hundreds of sharp little yellowish white barbed spears. The stranger looked for all the world like a huge black and yellow chestnut burr.

Bowser the Hound was as surprised as Blacky the Crow. He stopped short and his eyes looked as if they would pop out of his head. He looked so puzzled and so funny that Happy Jack Squirrel laughed aloud.

The stranger did not move. Bowser backed away and began to circle around again, sniffing and snuffing. Once in a while he barked. Still the stranger did not move. For

all the sign of life he made he might in truth have been a giant chestnut burr.

Bowser sat down and looked at him. Then he walked around to the other side and sat down. "What a queer thing," thought Bowser. "What a very queer thing."

Bowser took a step nearer. Then he took another step. Nothing happened.

Finally Bowser reached out, and with his nose gingerly touched the prickly ball. Slap! The stranger's tail had struck Bowser full in the face.

Bowser yelled with pain and rolled over and over on the ground. Sticking in his tender lips were a dozen sharp little spears, and claw and rub at them as he would, Bowser could not get them out. Every time he touched them he yelped with pain. Finally he gave it up and started for home with his tail between his legs like a whipped puppy, and with every step he yelped.

When he had disappeared and his yelps had died away in the distance, the stranger unrolled, the sharp little spears disappeared in the long hair of his coat and, just as if nothing at all had happened, the stranger walked slowly over to a tall maple and began to climb it.

And this is how Prickly Porky the Porcupine came to the Green Forest, and won the respect and admiration of all the little meadow people and forest folks, including Reddy Fox. Since that day no one has tried to meddle with Prickly Porky or his business.

CHAPTER III

HOW PRICKLY PORKY GOT HIS QUILLS

The newcomer in the Green Forest was a source of great interest to the Merry Little Breezes. Ever since they had seen him turn himself into a huge prickly ball, like a giant chestnut burr, and with a slap of his tail send Bowser the Hound yelping home with his lips stuck full of little barbed spears, they had visited the Green Forest every day to watch Prickly Porky. He was not very social. Indeed, he was not social at all, but attended strictly to his own business, which consisted chiefly of stripping bark from the trees and eating it. Never had the Merry Little Breezes seen such an appetite! Already that part of the Green Forest where he had chosen to live had many bare stark trees, killed that Prickly Porky the Porcupine might live. You see a tree cannot live without bark, and Prickly Porky had stripped them clean to fill his stomach.

But if Prickly Porky was not social he was not unfriendly. He seemed to enjoy having the Merry Little Breezes about, and did not in the least mind having them rumple up the long hair of his coat to feel the sharp little barbed spears underneath. Some of these were so loose that they dropped out. Peter Rabbit's curiosity led him to examine some of these among bits of bark at the foot of a tree. Peter wished that he had left them alone. One of the sharp little barbs pierced his tender skin and Peter could

not get it out. He had to ask Johnny Chuck to do it for him, and it had hurt dreadfully.

After that the little meadow people and forest folks held Prickly Porky in greater respect than ever and left him severely alone, which was just what he seemed to want.

One morning the Merry Little Breezes failed to find Prickly Porky in the Green Forest. Could he have left as mysteriously as he had come? They hurried down to the Smiling Pool to tell Great-Grandfather Frog. Bursting through the bulrushes on the edge of the Smiling Pool, they nearly upset Jerry Muskrat, who was sitting on an old log intently watching something out in the middle of the Smiling Pool. It was Prickly Porky. Some of the sharp little barbed spears were standing on end; altogether he was the queerest sight the Smiling Pool had seen for a long time.

He was swimming easily and you may be sure no one tried to bother him. Little Joe Otter and Billy Mink sat on the Big Rock and for once they had forgotten to play tricks. When Prickly Porky headed towards the Big Rock, Little Joe Otter suddenly remembered that he had business down the Laughing Brook, and Billy Mink recalled that Mother Mink had forbidden him to play at the Smiling Pool. Prickly Porky had the Smiling Pool quite to himself.

When he had swum to his heart's content he climbed out, shook himself and slowly ambled up the Lone Little Path to the Green Forest. The Merry Little Breezes watched him out of sight. Then they danced over to the big green lily-pad on which sat Grandfather Frog. The Merry Little Breezes are great favorites with Grandfather Frog. As usual they brought him some foolish green flies. Grandfather Frog's eyes twinkled as he snapped up the last foolish green fly.

"Chug-a-rum!" said Grandfather Frog, "and now I suppose you want a story." And he folded his hands across his white and yellow waistcoat.

"If you please!" shouted the Merry Little Breezes. "If you please, do tell us how it is that Prickly Porky has spears on his back!"

Grandfather settled himself comfortably. "Chug-a-rum!" said he. "Once upon a time when the world was young, Mr. Porcupine, the grandfather a thou- sand times removed of Prickly Porky, whom you all know, lived in the Green Forest where old King Bear ruled. Mr. Porcupine was a slow clumsy fellow, just as his grandson a thousand times removed is to-day. He was so slow moving, and when he tried to hurry tumbled over himself so much, that he had hard work to get enough to eat. Always some one reached the berry patch before he did. The beetles and the bugs were so spry that seldom could he catch them. Hunger was in his stomach, and little else most of the time. Mr. Porcupine grew thin and thinner and still more thin. His long, shaggy coat looked twice too big for him. Because he was so hungry he could sleep little, and night as well as day he roamed the forest, thinking of nothing but his empty stomach, and looking for something to put in it. So he learned to see by night as well as by day.

"One day he could not find a single berry and not a beetle or a bug could he catch. He was so hungry that he sat down with his back against a big black birch, and clasping both hands over his lean stomach, he wept. There Sister South Wind found him, and her heart was moved to pity, for she knew that his wits were as slow as his body. Softly she stole up behind him.

"'Try the bark of the black birch; it's sweet and good," whispered Sister South Wind. Then she hurried on her way.

"Mr. Porcupine still sat with his hands clasped over his lean stomach, for it took a long time for his slow wit to understand what Sister South Wind meant. 'Bark, bark, try bark,' said Mr. Porcupine over and over to himself. He rolled his dull little eyes up at the big black birch. 'I believe I will try it,' said Mr. Porcupine at last.

"Slowly he turned and began to gnaw the bark of the big black birch. It was tough, but it tasted good. Clumsily he began to climb, tearing off a mouthful of bark here and there as he climbed.

The higher he got the tenderer and sweeter the bark became. Finally he reached the top of the tree, and there on the small branches the bark was so tender and so sweet that he ate and ate and ate until for the first time in many days Mr. Porcupine had a full stomach. That night he curled up in a hollow log and slept all the night through, dreaming of great forests of black birch and all he wanted to eat.

"The next day he hunted for and found another black birch, and climbing to the top, he ate and ate until his stomach was full. From that time on Mr. Porcupine ceased to hunt for berries or beetles or bugs. He grew stout and stouter. He filled his shaggy coat until it was so tight it threatened to burst.

"Now while Mr. Porcupine was so thin and lean he had no enemies, but when he grew stout and then fat, Mr. Panther and Mr. Fisher and Mr. Bobcat and even old King Bear began to cast longing eyes upon him, for times were hard and they were hungry. Mr. Porcupine began to grow

afraid. By night he hid in hollow trees and by day he went abroad to eat only when he was sure that no one bigger than himself was about. And because he no longer dared to move about as before, he no longer depended upon the black birch alone, but learned to eat and to like all kinds of bark.

"One day he had made his breakfast on the bark of a honey-locust. When he came down the tree he brought with him a strip of bark, and attached to it were some of the long thorns with which the honey-locust seeks to protect itself. When he reached the ground whom should he find waiting for him but Mr. Panther. Mr. Panther was very lean and very hungry, for hunting had been poor and the times were hard.

"'Good morning, Mr. Porcupine,' said Mr. Panther, with a wicked grin. 'How fat you are!'

"'Good morning, Mr. Panther,' said Mr. Porcupine politely, but his long hair stood on end with fright, as he looked into Mr. Panther's cruel yellow eyes.

"'I say, how fat you are,' said Mr. Panther, licking his chops and showing all his long teeth. 'What do you find to eat these hard times?'

"'Bark, Mr. Panther, just bark,' said Mr. Porcupine, while his teeth chattered with fear. 'It really is very nice and sweet. Won't you try a piece, Mr. Panther?' Mr. Porcupine held out the strip of locust bark which he had brought down the tree for his lunch.

"Now Mr. Panther had never tried bark, but he thought to himself that if it made Mr. Porcupine so fat it must be good. He would try the piece of bark first and eat Mr. Porcupine afterward. So he reached out and snapped up the strip of bark.

"Now the locust thorns were long and they were sharp. They pierced Mr. Panther's tender lips and his tongue. They stuck in the roof of his mouth. Mr. Panther spat and yelled with pain and rage and clawed frantically at his mouth. He rolled over and over trying to get rid of the thorns. Mr. Porcupine didn't stay to watch him. For once in his life he hurried. By the time Mr. Panther was rid of the last thorn, Mr. Porcupine was nowhere to be seen. He was safely hidden inside a hollow log.

"Mr. Porcupine didn't sleep that night. He just lay and thought and thought and thought. The next morning, very early, before any one else was astir, he started out to call on old Mother Nature.

"'Good morning, Mr. Porcupine, what brings you out so early?' asked old Mother Nature.

"Mr. Porcupine bowed very low. 'If you please, Mother Nature, I want you to help me,' said he.

"Then he told her all about his meeting with Mr. Panther and how helpless he was when he met his enemies, and he begged her to give him stout claws and a big mouth full of long teeth that he might protect himself.

"Old Mother Nature thought a few minutes. 'Mr. Porcupine,' said she, 'you have always minded your own business. You do not know how to fight. If I should give you a big mouth full of long teeth you would not know how to use them. You move too slowly. Instead, I will give you a thousand little spears. They shall be hidden in the long hair of your coat and only when you are in danger shall you use them. Go back to the Green Forest, and the next time you meet Mr. Panther or Mr. Fisher or Mr. Bobcat or old King Bear roll yourself into a ball and the thousand little spears will protect you. Now go!'

"Mr. Porcupine thanked old Mother Nature and started back for the Green Forest. Once he stopped to smooth down his long, rough coat. Sure enough, there, under the long hair, he felt a thousand little spears. He went along happily until suddenly he met Mr. Panther. Yes, Sir, he met Mr. Panther.

"Mr. Panther was feeling very ugly, for his mouth was sore. He grinned wickedly when he saw Mr. Porcupine and stepped right out in front of him, all the time licking his lips. Mr. Porcupine trembled all over, but he remembered what old Mother Nature had told him. In a flash he had rolled up into a tight ball. Sure enough, the thousand little spears sprang out of his long coat, and he looked like a huge chestnut burr.

"Mr. Panther was so surprised he didn't know just what to do. He reached out a paw and touched Mr. Porcupine. Mr. Porcupine was nervous. He switched his tail around and it struck Mr. Panther's paw. Mr. Panther yelled, for there were spears on Mr. Porcupine's tail and they were worse than the locust thorns. He backed away hurriedly and limped off up the Lone Little Path, growling horribly. Mr. Porcupine waited until Mr. Panther was out of sight, then he unrolled, and slowly and happily he walked back to his home in the Green Forest.

"And since that long-ago day when the world was young, the Porcupines have feared nothing and have attended strictly to their own business. And that is how they happen to have a thousand little barbed spears, which are called quills," concluded Grandfather Frog.

The Merry Little Breezes drew a long breath. "Thank you, Grandfather Frog, thank you ever so much!" they cried all together. "We are going back now to tell Prickly

Porky that we know all about his little spears and how he happens to have them."

But first they blew a dozen fat, foolish, green flies over to Grandfather Frog.

CHAPTER IV

PETER RABBIT'S EGG ROLLING

It was spring. Drummer the Woodpecker was beating the long roll on the hollow limb of the old hickory, that all the world might know. Old Mother West Wind, hurrying down from the Purple Hills across the Green Meadows, stopped long enough to kiss the smiling little bluets that crowded along the Lone Little Path. All up and down the Laughing Brook were shy violets turning joyful faces up to jolly, round, red Mr. Sun. Johnny Chuck was sitting on his doorstep, stretching one short leg and then another, to get the kinks out, after his long, long winter sleep. Very beautiful, very beautiful indeed, were the Green Meadows, and very happy were all the little meadow people all but Peter Rabbit, who sat at the top of the Crooked Little Path that winds down the hill. No, Sir, Peter Rabbit, happy-go-lucky Peter, who usually carries the lightest heart on the Green Meadows, was not happy. Indeed, he was very unhappy. As he sat there at the top of the Crooked Little Path and looked down on the Green Meadows, he saw nothing beautiful at all because, why, because his big soft eyes were full of tears. Splash! A big tear fell at his feet in the Crooked Little Path. Splash! That was another tear. Splash! splash!

"My gracious! My gracious! What is the matter, Peter Rabbit? asked a gruff voice close to one of Peter's long ears.

Peter jumped. Then he winked the tears back and looked around. There sat old Mr. Toad. He looked very solemn, very solemn indeed. He was wearing a shabby old suit, the very one he had slept in all winter. Peter forgot his troubles long enough to wonder if old Mr. Toad would swallow his old clothes when he got a new suit.

"What's the matter, Peter Rabbit, what's the matter?" repeated old Mr. Toad.

Peter looked a little foolish. He hesitated, coughed, looked this way and looked that way, hitched his trousers up, and then, why then he found his tongue and told old Mr. Toad all his troubles.

"You see," said Peter Rabbit, "it's almost Easter and I haven't found a single egg."

"An egg!' exclaimed old Mr. Toad. "Bless my stars! What do you want of an egg, Peter Rabbit? You don't eat eggs."

"I don't want just one egg, oh, no, no indeed! I want a lot of eggs," said Peter. "You see, Mr. Toad, I was going to have an Easter egg rolling, and here it is almost Easter and not an egg to be found!" Peter's eyes filled with tears again.

Old Mr. Toad rolled one eye up at jolly, round, red Mr. Sun and winked. "Have you seen Mrs. Grouse and Mrs. Pheasant?" asked old Mr. Toad.

"Yes," said Peter Rabbit, "and they won't have any eggs until after Easter."

"Have you been to see Mrs. Quack?" asked old Mr. Toad.

"Yes," said Peter Rabbit, "and she says she can't spare a single one."

Old Mr. Toad looked very thoughtful. He scratched the tip of his nose with his left hind foot. Then he winked

once more at jolly, round, red Mr. Sun. "Have you been to see Jimmy Skunk?" he inquired.

Peter Rabbit's big eyes opened very wide. "Jimmy Skunk!" he exclaimed. "Jimmy Skunk! What does Jimmy Skunk have to do with eggs?"

Old Mr. Toad chuckled deep down in his throat. He chuckled and chuckled until he shook all over.

"Jimmy Skunk knows more about eggs than all the other little meadow people put together," said old Mr. Toad. "You take my advice, Peter Rabbit, and ask Jimmy Skunk to help you get the eggs for your Easter egg rolling."

Then old Mr. Toad picked up his cane and started down the Crooked Little Path to the Green Meadows. There he found the Merry Little Breezes stealing kisses from the bashful little wind flowers.

Old Mr. Toad puffed out his throat and pretended that he disapproved, disapproved very much indeed, but at the same time he rolled one eye up at jolly, round, red Mr. Sun and winked.

"Haven't you anything better to do than make bashful little flowers hang their heads?" asked old Mr. Toad gruffly.

The Merry Little Breezes stopped their dancing and gathered about old Mr. Toad. "What's the matter with you this morning, Mr. Toad?" asked one of them. "Do you want us to go find a breakfast for you?"

"No," replied old Mr. Toad sourly. "I am quite able to get breakfast for myself. But Peter Rabbit is up on the hill crying because he cannot find any eggs."

"Crying because he cannot find any eggs! Now what does Peter Rabbit want of eggs?" cried the Merry Little Breezes all together.

"Supposing you go ask him," replied old Mr. Toad tartly, once more picking up his cane and starting for the Smiling Pool to call on his cousin, Great-Grandfather Frog.

The Merry Little Breezes stared after him for a few minutes, then they started in a mad race up the Crooked Little Path to find Peter Rabbit. He wasn't at the top of the Crooked Little Path. They looked everywhere, but not so much as the tip of one of his long ears could they see. Finally they met him just coming away from Jimmy Skunk's house. Peter was hopping, skipping, jumping up in the air and kicking his long heels as only Peter can. There was no trace of tears in his big, soft eyes. Plainly Peter Rabbit was in good spirits, in the very best of spirits. When he saw the Merry Little Breezes he jumped twice as high as he had jumped before, then sat up very straight.

"Hello!" said Peter Rabbit.

"Hello yourself," replied the Merry Little Breezes. "Tell us what under the sun you want of eggs, Peter Rabbit, and we'll try to find some for you."

Peter's eyes sparkled. "I'm going to have an Easter egg rolling," said he, "but you needn't look for any eggs, for I am going to have all I want; Jimmy Skunk has promised to get them for me."

"What is an Easter egg rolling?" asked the Merry Little Breezes.

Peter looked very mysterious. "Wait and see," he replied. Then a sudden thought popped into his head. "Will you do something for me? he asked.

Of course the Merry Little Breezes were delighted to do anything they could for Peter Rabbit, and told him so.

So in a few minutes Peter had them scattering in every direction with invitations to all the little people of the Green Meadows and all the little folks of the Green Forest to attend his egg rolling on Easter morning.

Very, very early on Easter morning Old Mother West Wind hurried down from the Purple Hills and swept all the rain clouds out of the sky. Jolly, round, red Mr. Sun climbed up in the sky, smiling his broadest. All the little song birds sang their sweetest, and some who really cannot sing at all tried to just because they were so happy. Across the beautiful Green Meadows came all the little meadow people and forest folks; to the smooth, grassy bank where the big hickory grows. Peter Rabbit was there waiting for them. He had brushed his clothes until you would hardly have known him. He felt very much excited and very important and very, very happy, for this was to be the very first egg rolling the Green Meadows had ever known, and it was all his very own.

Hidden behind the old hickory, tucked under pieces of bark, scattered among the bluets and wind flowers were big eggs, little eggs and middle-sized eggs, for Jimmy Skunk had been true to his promise. Where they came from Jimmy wouldn't tell. Perhaps if old Gray Goose and Mrs. Quack could have been there, they would have understood why it took so long to fill their nests. Perhaps if Farmer Brown's boy had happened along, he would have guessed why he had to hunt so long in the barn and under the henhouse to get enough eggs for breakfast. But Jimmy Skunk held his tongue and just smiled to see how happy Peter Rabbit was.

First came Peter's cousin, Jumper the Hare. Then up from the Smiling Pool came Jerry Muskrat, Little Joe Otter,

Billy Mink, Grandfather Frog and Spotty the Turtle. Johnny Chuck, Danny Meadow Mouse, and old Mr. Toad came together. Of course Reddy Fox was on hand promptly. Striped Chipmunk came dancing out from the home no one has been able to find. Out from the Green Forest trotted Bobby Coon, Happy Jack Squirrel and Chatterer the Red Squirrel. Behind them shuffled Prickly Porky. Last of all came Jimmy Skunk, who never hurries, and Jimmy wore his very best suit of black and white. Up in the old hickory sat Blacky the Crow, Sammy Jay and Drummer the Woodpecker, to watch the fun.

When all had arrived, Peter Rabbit started them to hunting for the eggs. Everybody got in the way of everybody else. Even old Mr. Toad caught the excitement and hopped this way and hopped that way hunting for eggs. Danny Meadow Mouse found a goose egg bigger than himself and had to get help to bring it in. Bobby Coon stubbed his toes and fell down with an egg under each arm. Such a looking sight as he was! He had to go down to the Smiling Pool to wash.

By and by, when all the eggs had been found, Peter Rabbit sent a big goose egg rolling down the grassy bank and then raced after it to bring it back and roll it down again. In a few minutes the green grassy bank was covered with eggs- -big eggs, little eggs, all kinds of eggs. Some were nearly round and rolled swiftly to the bottom. Some were sharp pointed at one end and rolled crookedly and sometimes turned end over end. A big egg knocked Johnny Chuck's legs from under him and, because Johnny Chuck is round and roly-poly, he just rolled over and over after the egg clear to the bottom of the green grassy bank. And

it was such fun that he scrambled up and did it all over again.

Then Bobby Coon tried it. Pretty soon every one was trying it, even Reddy Fox, who seldom forgets his dignity. For once Blacky the Crow and Sammy Jay almost wished that they hadn't got wings, so that they might join in the fun.

But the greatest fun of all was when Prickly Porky decided that he, too, would join in the rolling. He tucked his head down in his vest and made himself into a perfectly round ball. Now when he did this, all his hidden spears stood out straight, until he looked like a great, giant, chestnut burr, and every one hurried to get out of his way. Over and over, faster and faster, he rolled down the green, grassy bank until he landed - - where do you think? Why right in the midst of a lot of eggs that had been left when the other little people had scampered out of his way.

Now, having his head tucked into his vest, Prickly Porky couldn't see where he was going, so when he reached the bottom and hopped to his feet he didn't know what to make of the shout that went up from all the little meadow people. So foolish Prickly Porky lost his temper because he was being laughed at, and started off up the Lone Little Path to his home in the Green Forest. And what do you think? Why, stuck fast' in a row on the spears on his back, Prickly Porky carried off six of Peter Rabbit's Easter eggs, and didn't know it.

CHAPTER V

HOW JOHNNY CHUCK RAN AWAY

Johnny Chuck stood on the doorstep of his house and watched old Mrs. Chuck start down the Lone Little Path across the Green Meadows towards Farmer Brown's garden. She had her market basket on her arm, and Johnny knew that when she returned it would be full of the things he liked best. But not even the thought of these could chase away the frown that darkened Johnny Chuck's face. He had never been to Farmer Brown's garden and he had begged very hard to go that morning with old Mrs. Chuck. But she had said "No. It isn't safe for such a little chap as you." And when Mrs. Chuck said "No," Johnny knew that she meant it, and that it was of no use at all to beg.

So he stood with his hands in his pockets and scowled and scowled as he thought of old Mrs. Chuck's very last words: "Now, Johnny, don't you dare put a foot outside of the yard until I get back."

Pretty soon along came Peter Rabbit. Peter was trying to jump over his own shadow. When he saw Johnny Chuck he stopped abruptly. Then he looked up at the blue sky and winked at jolly, round, red Mr. Sun. "Looks mighty showery 'round here," he remarked to no one in particular.

Johnny Chuck smiled in spite of himself. Then he told Peter Rabbit how he had got to stay at home and mind the house and couldn't put his foot outside the yard. Now

Peter hasn't had the best bringing up in the world, for his mother has such a big family that she is kept busy just getting them something to eat. So Peter has been allowed to bring himself up and do just about as he pleases.

"How long will your mother be gone?" asked Peter.

"Most all the morning," said Johnny Chuck mournfully.

Peter hopped a couple of steps nearer. "Say, Johnny," he whispered, "how is she going to know whether you stay in the yard all the time or not, so long as you are here when she gets home? I know where there's the dandiest sweet-clover patch. We can go over there and back easy before old Mrs. Chuck gets home, and she won't know anything about it. Come on!"

Johnny Chuck's mouth watered at the thought of the sweet-clover, but still he hesitated, for Johnny Chuck had been taught to mind.

"'Fraid cat! 'Fraid cat! Tied to your mother's apron strings!" jeered Peter Rabbit.

"I ain't either!" cried Johnny Chuck. And then, just to prove it, he thrust his hands into his pockets and swaggered out into the Lone Little Path.

"Where's your old clover patch?!" asked he.

"I'll show you," said Peter Rabbit, and off he started, lipperty-lipperty-lip, so fast that Johnny Chuck lost his breath trying to make his short legs keep up. And all the time Johnny's conscience was pricking him.

Peter Rabbit left the Lone Little Path across the Green Meadows for some secret little paths of his own. His long legs



"Please, please wait for me, Peter Rabbit,"
panted Johnny Chuck.

took him over the ground very fast. Johnny Chuck, running behind him, grew tired and hot, for Johnny's legs are short and he is fat and roly-poly. At times all he could see was the white patch on the seat of Peter Rabbit's pants. He began to wish that he had minded old Mrs. Chuck and stayed at home. It was too late to go back now, for he didn't know the way.

"Wait up, Peter Rabbit!" he called.

Peter Rabbit just flirted his tail and ran faster.

"Please, please wait for me, Peter Rabbit," panted Johnny Chuck, and began to cry. Yes, Sir, he began to cry. You see he was so hot and tired, and then he was so afraid that he would lose sight of Peter Rabbit. If he did he would surely be lost, and then what should he do? The very thought made him run just a little faster.

Now Peter Rabbit is really one of the best-hearted little fellows in the world, just happy-go-lucky and careless. So when finally he looked back and saw Johnny Chuck way, way behind, with the tears running down his cheeks, and how hot and tired he looked, Peter sat down and waited. Pretty soon Johnny Chuck came up, puffing and blowing, and threw himself flat on the ground.

"Please, Peter Rabbit, is it very much farther to the sweet-clover patch? he panted, wiping his eyes with the backs of his hands.

"No," replied Peter Rabbit, "just a little way more. We'll rest here a few minutes and then I won't run so fast."

So Peter Rabbit and Johnny Chuck lay down in the grass to rest while Johnny Chuck recovered his breath. Every minute or two Peter would sit up very straight, prick up his long ears and look this way and look that way as if

he expected to see something unusual. It made Johnny Chuck nervous.

"What do you keep doing that for, Peter Rabbit?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing" replied Peter Rabbit. But he kept right on doing it just the same. Then suddenly, after one of these looks abroad, he crouched down very flat and whispered in Johnny Chuck's ear in great excitement.

"Old Whitetail is down here and he's headed this way. We'd better be moving," he said.

Johnny Chuck felt a chill of fear. "Who is Old Whitetail?" he asked, as he prepared to follow Peter Rabbit.

"Don't you know?" asked Peter in surprise. "Say, you are green! Why, he's Mr. Marsh Hawk, and if he once gets the chance he'll gobble you up, skin, bones and all. There's an old stone wall just a little way from here, and the sooner we get there the better!"

Peter Rabbit led the way, and if he had run fast before it was nothing to the way he ran now. A great fear made Johnny Chuck forget that he was tired, and he ran as he had never run before in all his short life. Just as he dived headfirst into a hole between two big stones, a shadow swept over the grass and something sharp tore a gap in the seat of his pants and made him squeal with fright and pain. But he wriggled in beside Peter Rabbit and was safe, while Mr. Marsh Hawk flew off with a scream of rage and disappointment.

Johnny Chuck had never been so frightened in all his short life. He made himself as small as possible and crept as far as he could underneath a friendly stone in the old wall. His pants were torn and his leg smarted dreadfully

where one of Mr. Marsh Hawk's cruel, sharp claws had scratched him. How he did wish that he had minded old Mrs. Chuck and stayed in his own yard, as she had told him to.

Peter Rabbit looked at the tear in Johnny Chuck's pants. "Pooh!" said Peter Rabbit, "don't mind a little thing like that,"

"But I'm afraid to go home with my pants torn," said Johnny Chuck.

"Don't go home," replied Peter Rabbit. "I don't unless I feel like it. You stay away a long time and then your mother will be so glad to see you that she won't ever think of the pants."

Johnny Chuck looked doubtful, but before he could say anything Peter Rabbit stuck his head out to see if the way was clear. It was, and Peter's long legs followed his head. "Come on, Johnny Chuck," he shouted. "I'm going over to the sweet-clover patch."

But Johnny Chuck was afraid. He was almost sure that Old Whitetail was waiting just outside to gobble him up. It was a long time before he would put so much as the tip of his wee black nose out. But without Peter Rabbit it grew lonesomer and lonesomer in under the old stone wall. Besides, he was afraid that he would lose Peter Rabbit, and then he would be lost indeed, for he didn't know the way home.

Finally Johnny Chuck ventured to peep out. There was jolly, round, red Mr. Sun smiling down just as if he was used to seeing little runaway chucks every day. Johnny looked and looked for Peter Rabbit, but it was a long time before he saw him, and when he did all he saw were Peter Rabbit's funny long ears above the tops of the waving grass,

for Peter Rabbit was hidden in the sweet-clover patch, eating away for dear life.

It was only a little distance, but Johnny Chuck had had such a fright that he tried three times before he grew brave enough to scurry through the tall grass and join Peter Rabbit. My, how good that sweet-clover did taste! Johnny Chuck forgot all about Old Whitetail. He forgot all about his torn pants. He forgot that he had run away and didn't know the way home. He just ate and ate and ate until his stomach was so full he couldn't stuff another piece of sweet-clover into it.

Suddenly Peter Rabbit grabbed him by a sleeve and pulled him down flat.

"Sh-h-h," said Peter Rabbit, "don't move."

Johnny Chuck's heart almost stopped beating. What new danger could there be now? In a minute he heard a queer noise. Peeping between the stems of sweet-clover he saw what do you think? Why, old Mrs. Chuck cutting sweet-clover to put in the basket of vegetables she was taking home from Farmer Brown's garden.

Johnny Chuck gave a great sigh of relief, but he kept very still for he did not want her to find him there after she had told him not to put foot outside his own dooryard. "You wait here," whispered Peter Rabbit, and crept off through the clover. Pretty soon Johnny Chuck saw Peter Rabbit steal up behind old Mrs. Chuck and pull four big lettuce leaves out of her basket.

CHAPTER VI

PETER RABBIT'S RUN FOR LIFE

"I wish I hadn't run away," said Johnny Chuck dolefully, as he and Peter Rabbit peeped out from the sweet-clover patch and watched old Mrs. Chuck start for home with her market basket on her arm.

"You ought to think yourself lucky that your mother didn't find you here in the sweet-clover patch. If it hadn't been for me she would have," said Peter Rabbit.

Johnny Chuck's face grew longer and longer. His pants were torn, his leg was stiff and sore where old Mr. Marsh Hawk had scratched him that morning, but worse still his conscience pricked him. Yes, Sir, Johnny Chuck's conscience was pricking him hard, very hard indeed, because he had run away from home with Peter Rabbit after old Mrs. Chuck had told him not to leave the yard while she was away. Now he didn't know the way home.

"Peter Rabbit, I want to go home," said Johnny Chuck suddenly. "Isn't there a short cut so that I can get home before my mother does?

"No, there isn't," said Peter Rabbit. "And if there was what good would it do you? Old Mrs. Chuck would see that tear in your pants and then you'd catch it!"

"I don't care. Please won't you show me the way home, Peter Rabbit? begged Johnny Chuck.

Peter Rabbit yawned lazily as he replied: "What's the use of going now? You'll catch it anyway, so you might as

well stay and have all the fun you can. Say, I know a dandy old house up on the hill. Jimmy Skunk used to live there, but no one lives in it now. Let's go up and see it. It's a dandy place."

Now right down in his heart Johnny Chuck knew that he ought to go home, but he couldn't go unless Peter Rabbit would show him the way, and then he did want to see that old house. Perhaps Peter Rabbit was right (in his heart he knew that he wasn't) and he had better have all the fun he could. So Johnny Chuck followed Peter Rabbit up the hill to the old house of Jimmy Skunk.

Cobwebs covered the doorway. Johnny Chuck was going to brush them away, but Peter Rabbit stopped him. "Let's see if there isn't a back door," said he.

"Then we can use that, and if Bowser the Hound or Farmer Brown's boy comes along and finds this door they'll think no one ever lives here any more and you'll be safer than if you were right in your own home."

So they hunted and hunted, and by and by Johnny Chuck found the back door way off at one side and cunningly hidden under a tangle of grass. Inside was a long dark hall and at the end of that a nice big room. It was very dirty, and Johnny Chuck, who is very neat, at once began to clean house and soon had it spick and span. Suddenly they heard a voice outside the front door.

"Doesn't look as if anybody lives here, but seems as if I smell young rabbit and - - yes, I'm sure I smell young chuck, too. Guess I'll have a look inside."

"It's old Granny Fox," whispered Peter Rabbit, trembling with fright.

Then Peter Rabbit did a very brave thing. He remembered that Johnny Chuck could not run very fast

and that if it hadn't been for him, Johnny Chuck would be safe at home. "You stay right here," whispered Peter Rabbit. Then he slipped out the back door. Half-way down the hill he stopped and shouted:

"Old Granny Fox
Is slower than an ox!"

Then he started for the old brier patch as fast as his long legs could take him, and after him ran Granny Fox.

Peter Rabbit was running for his life. There was no doubt about it. Right behind him, grinding her long white teeth, her eyes snapping, ran old Granny Fox. Peter Rabbit did not like to think what would happen to him if she should catch him.

Peter Rabbit was used to running for his life. He had to do it at least once every day. But usually he was near a safe hiding place and he rather enjoyed the excitement. This time, however, the only place of safety he could think of was the friendly old brier patch, and that was a long way off.

Back at the old house on the hill, where Granny Fox had discovered Peter Rabbit, was little Johnny Chuck, trembling with fright. He crept to the back door of the old house to watch. He saw Granny Fox getting nearer and nearer to Peter Rabbit.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! She'll catch Peter Rabbit! She'll catch Peter Rabbit!" wailed Johnny Chuck, wringing his hands in despair.

It certainly looked as if Granny Fox would. She was right at Peter Rabbit's heels. Poor, happy-go-lucky, little Peter Rabbit! Two more jumps and Granny Fox would

have him! Johnny Chuck shut his eyes tight, for he didn't want to see.

But Peter Rabbit had no intention of being caught so easily. While he had seemed to be running his very hardest, really he was not. And all the time he was watching Granny Fox, for Peter Rabbit's big eyes are so placed that he can see behind him without turning his head. So he knew when Granny Fox was near enough to catch him in one more jump. Then Peter Rabbit dodged. Yes, Sir, Peter Rabbit dodged like a flash, and away he went in another direction lipperty-lipperty-lip, as fast as he could go.

Old Granny Fox had been so sure that in another minute she would have tender young rabbit for her dinner that she had begun to smile and her mouth actually watered. She did not see where she was going. All she saw was the white patch on the seat of Peter Rabbit's trousers bobbing up and down right in front of her nose.

When Peter Rabbit dodged, something surprising happened. Johnny Chuck, who had opened his eyes to see if all was over, jumped up and shouted for joy, and did a funny little dance in the doorway of the old house on the hill. Peter had dodged right in front of a wire fence, a fence with ugly, sharp barbs, and right smack into it ran Granny Fox! It scratched her face and tore her bright red cloak. It threw her back flat on the ground, with all the wind knocked out of her body.

When finally she had gotten her breath and scrambled to her feet, Peter Rabbit was almost over to the friendly old brier patch. He stopped and sat up very straight. Then he put his hands on his hips and shouted:

"Run, Granny, run!

Here comes a man who's got a gun!"

Granny Fox started nervously and looked this way and looked that way. There was no one in sight. Then she shook a fist at Peter Rabbit and started to limp off home.

Johnny Chuck gave a great sigh of relief. "My," said he, "I wish I was as smart as Peter Rabbit!"

"You will be if you live long enough," said a voice right behind him. It was old Mr. Toad.

Mr. Toad and Johnny Chuck sat in the doorway of the old house on the hill and watched old Granny Fox limp off home. "I wonder what it would seem like not to be afraid of anything in the whole world," said Johnny Chuck.

"People who mind their own business and don't get into mischief don't need to be afraid of anything," said Mr. Toad.

Johnny Chuck remembered how safe he had always felt at home with old Mrs. Chuck and how many times and how badly he had been frightened since he ran away that morning. "I guess perhaps you are right, Mr. Toad," said Johnny Chuck doubtfully.

"Of course I'm right," replied Mr. Toad. "Of course I'm right. Look at me; I attend strictly to my own affairs and no one ever bothers me."

"That's because you are so homely that no one wants you for a dinner when he can find anything else," said Peter Rabbit, who had come up from the friendly old brier patch.

"Better be homely than to need eyes in the back of my head to keep my skin whole," retorted Mr. Toad. "Now I don't know what it is to be afraid."

"Not of old Granny Fox?" asked Johnny Chuck.

"No," said Mr. Toad.

"Nor Bowser the Hound?"

"No," said Mr. Toad. "He's a friend of mine." Then Mr. Toad swelled himself up very big. "I'm not afraid of anything under the sun," boasted Mr. Toad.

Peter Rabbit looked at Johnny Chuck and slowly winked one eye. "I guess I'll go up the hill and have a look around," said Peter Rabbit, hitching up his trousers. So Peter Rabbit went off up the hill, while Mr. Toad smoothed down his dingy white waistcoat and told Johnny Chuck what a foolish thing fear is.

By and by there was a queer rustling in the grass back of them. Mr. Toad hopped around awkwardly. "What was that?" he whispered.

"Just the wind in the grass, I guess," said Johnny Chuck.

For a while all was still and Mr. Toad settled himself comfortably and began to talk once more. "No, Sir," said Mr. Toad, "I'm not afraid of any thing."

Just then there was another rustle in the grass, a little nearer than before. Mr. Toad certainly was nervous. He stretched up on the tips of his toes and looked in the direction of the sound. Then Mr. Toad turned pale. Yes, Sir, Mr. Toad actually turned pale! His big, bulging eyes looked as if they would pop oat of his head.

"I - I must be going," said Mr. Toad hastily. "I quite forgot an important engagement down on the Green Meadows. If Mr. Blacksnake should happen to call, don't mention that you have seen me, will you, Johnny Chuck?

Johnny Chuck looked over in the grass. Something long and slim and black was wriggling through it. When

he turned about again, Mr. Toad was half-way down the hill, going with such big hops that three times he fell flat on his face, and when he picked himself up he didn't even stop to brush off his clothes.

"I wonder what it seems like not to be afraid of anything in the world?" said a voice right behind Johnny Chuck.

There stood Peter Rabbit laughing so that he had to hold his sides, and in one hand was the end of an old leather strap which he had fooled Mr. Toad into thinking was Mr. Blacksnake.

CHAPTER VII

A JOKER FOOLED

Peter Rabbit and Johnny Chuck sat in the doorway of Jimmy Skunk's deserted old house on the hill and looked down across the Green Meadows. Every few minutes Peter Rabbit would chuckle as he thought of how he had fooled Mr. Toad into thinking that an old leather strap was Mr. Blacksnake.

"Is Mr. Blacksnake so very dangerous? asked Johnny Chuck, who had seen very little of the world.

"Not for you or me," replied Peter Rabbit, "because we've grown too big for him to swallow. But he would like nothing better than to catch Mr. Toad for his dinner. But if you ever meet Mr. Blacksnake, be polite to him. He is very quick tempered, is Mr. Blacksnake, but if you don't bother him he'll not bother you. My goodness, I wonder what's going on down there in the alders! "

Johnny Chuck looked over to the alder thicket. He saw Sammy Jay, Blacky the Crow and Mrs. Redwing sitting in the alders. They were calling back and forth, apparently very much excited. Peter Rabbit looked this way and that way to see if the coast was clear.

"Come on, Johnny Chuck, let's go down and see what the trouble is," said he, for you know Peter Rabbit has a great deal of curiosity.

So down to the alder thicket skipped Peter Rabbit and Johnny Chuck as fast as they could go. Half-way there they

were joined by Danny Meadow Mouse, for he too had heard the fuss and wanted to know what it all meant.

"What's the matter?" asked Peter Rabbit of Sammy Jay, but Sammy was too excited to answer and simply pointed down into the middle of the alder thicket. So the three of them, one behind the other, very softly crept in among the alders. A great commotion was going on among the dead leaves. Danny Meadow Mouse gave one look, then he turned as pale as did Mr. Toad when Peter Rabbit fooled him with the old leather strap. "This is no place for me!" exclaimed Danny Meadow Mouse, and started for home as fast as he could run.

Partly under an old log lay Mr. Blacksnake. There seemed to be something the matter with him. He looked sick, and threshed and struggled till he made the leaves fly. Sammy Jay and Blacky the Crow and Mrs. Redwing called all sorts of insulting things to him, but he paid no attention to them. Once Mrs. Redwing darted down and pecked him sharply. But Mr. Blacksnake seemed quite helpless.

"What's the matter with him?" asked Johnny Chuck in a whisper.

"Nothing. Wait and you'll see. Sammy Jay and Mrs. Redwing better watch out or they'll be sorry," replied Peter Rabbit.

Just then Mr. Blacksnake wedged his head in under the old log and began to push and wriggle harder than ever. Then Johnny Chuck gasped. Mr. Blacksnake was crawling out of his clothes! Yes, Sir, his old suit was coming off wrong side out, just like a glove, and underneath he wore a splendid new suit of shiny black!

"It's time for us to be moving," whispered Peter Rabbit. "After Mr, Blacksnake has changed his clothes he is pretty short tempered. Just hear him hiss at Mrs. Redwing and Sammy Jay!"

They tiptoed out of the alder thicket and started back for the old house on the hill. Peter Rabbit suddenly giggled out loud. "To-morrow," said Peter Rabbit "we'll come back and get Mr. Blacksnake's old suit and have some fun with Danny Meadow Mouse."

The next morning Danny Meadow Mouse sat on his doorstep nodding. He was dreaming that his tail was long like the tails of all his cousins. One of Old Mother West Wind's Merry Little Breezes stole up and whispered in his ear. Danny Meadow Mouse was awake, wide awake in an instant. "So Peter Rabbit is going to play a joke on me and scare me into fits!" said Danny Meadow Mouse.

"Yes," said the Merry Little Breeze, "for I overheard him telling Johnny Chuck all about it."

Danny Meadow Mouse began to laugh softly to himself. "Will you do something for me?" he asked the Merry Little Breeze.

"Sure," replied the Merry Little Breeze.

"Then go find Cresty the Fly-catcher and tell him that I want to see him," said Danny Meadow Mouse.

The Merry Little Breeze hurried away, and pretty soon back he came with Cresty the Fly-catcher.

Now all this time Peter Rabbit had been very busy planning his joke on Danny Meadow Mouse. He and Johnny Chuck had gone down to the alder thicket, where they had seen Mr. Blacksnake change his clothes, and they had found his old suit just as he had left it.

"We'll take this up and stretch it out behind a big tussock of grass near the home of Danny Meadow Mouse," chuckled Peter Rabbit. "Then I'll invite Danny Meadow Mouse to take a walk, and when we come by the tussock of grass he will think he sees Mr. Blacksnake himself all ready to swallow him. Then we'll see some fun."

So they carried Mr. Blacksnake's old suit of clothes and hid it behind the big tussock of grass, and arranged it to look as much like Mr. Blacksnake as they could. Then Johnny Chuck went back to the old house on the hill to watch the fun, while Peter Rabbit went to call on Danny Meadow Mouse.

"Good morning, Peter Rabbit," said Danny Meadow Mouse politely.

"Good morning, Danny Meadow Mouse," replied Peter Rabbit. "Don't you want to take a walk with me this fine morning?"

"I'll be delighted to go," said Danny Meadow Mouse, reaching for his hat.

So they started out to walk and presently they came to the big tussock of grass.

Peter Rabbit stopped. "Excuse me, while I tie up my shoe. You go ahead and I'll join you in a minute," said Peter Rabbit.

So Danny Meadow Mouse went ahead. As soon as his back was turned Peter Rabbit clapped both hands over his mouth to keep from laughing, for you see he expected to see Danny Meadow Mouse come flying back in great fright the minute he turned the big tussock and saw Mr. Blacksnake's old suit.

Peter Rabbit waited and waited, but no Danny Meadow Mouse. What did it mean? Peter stopped

laughing and peeped around the big tussock. There sat Danny Meadow Mouse with both hands clapped over his mouth, and laughing till the tears rolled down his cheeks, and Mr. Blacksnake's old suit was nowhere to be seen.

"He laughs best who laughs last," said Danny Meadow Mouse to himself, late that afternoon, as he sat on his doorstep and chuckled softly.

When he had first heard from a Merry Little Breeze that Peter Rabbit and Johnny Chuck were planning to play a joke on him and scare him into fits with a suit of Mr. Blacksnake's old clothes, he had tried very hard to think of some way to turn the joke on the jokers. Then he had remembered Cresty the Flycatcher and had sent for him.

Now Cresty the Fly-catcher is a handsome fellow. In fact he is quite the gentleman, and does not look at all like one who would be at all interested in any one's old clothes. But he is. He is never satisfied until he has lined the hollow in the old apple-tree, which is his home, with the old clothes of Mr. Snake. So when Danny Meadow Mouse sent for him and whispered in his ear Cresty the Fly-catcher smiled broadly and winked knowingly. "I certainly will be there, Danny Meadow Mouse, I certainly will be there," said he. And he was there. He had hidden in a tree close by the big tussock of grass, behind which Peter Rabbit had planned to place Mr. Blacksnake's old suit so as to scare Danny Meadow Mouse. His eyes had sparkled when he saw what a fine big suit it was. "My, but this will save me a lot of trouble," said he to himself. "It's the finest old suit I've ever seen."

The minute Peter Rabbit and Johnny Chuck had turned their backs down dropped Cresty the Fly-catcher, picked up Mr. Blacksnake's old suit, and taking it with

him, once more hid in the tree. Presently back came Peter Rabbit with Danny Meadow Mouse. You know what had happened then.

Cresty the Fly-catcher had nearly dropped his prize, it tickled him so to see Peter Rabbit on one side of the big tussock laughing fit to kill himself at the scare he thought Danny Meadow Mouse would get when he first saw Mr. Blacksnake's old suit, and on the other side of the big tussock Danny Meadow Mouse laughing fit to kill himself over the surprise Peter Rabbit would get when he found that Mr. Blacksnake's old clothes had disappeared.

Pretty soon Peter Rabbit had stopped laughing and peeped around the big tussock. There sat Danny Meadow Mouse laughing fit to kill himself, but not a trace of the old suit which was to have given him such a scare. Peter couldn't believe his own eyes, for he had left it there not three minutes before. Of course it wouldn't do to say anything about it, so he had hurried around the big tussock as if he was merely trying to catch up.

"What are you laughing at, Danny Meadow Mouse?" asked Peter Rabbit.

"I was thinking what a joke it would be if we could only find an old suit of Mr. Blacksnake's and fool old Mr. Toad into thinking that it was Mr. Blacksnake himself," replied Danny Meadow Mouse. "What are you looking for, Peter Rabbit? Have you lost something?"

"No," said Peter Rabbit. "I thought I heard footsteps, and I was looking to see if it could be Reddy Fox creeping through the grass."

Danny Meadow Mouse had stopped laughing. "Excuse me, Peter Rabbit," said he hurriedly, "I've just remembered an important engagement." And off he

started for home as fast as he could go. And to this day Peter Rabbit doesn't know what became of. Mr. Blacksnake's old clothes.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FUSS IN THE BIG PINE

Peter Rabbit hopped down the Crooked Little Path to the Lone Little Path and down the Lone Little Path to the home of Johnny Chuck. Johnny Chuck sat on his doorstep dreaming. They were very pleasant dreams, very pleasant dreams indeed. They were such pleasant dreams that for once Johnny Chuck forgot to put his funny little ears on guard. So Johnny Chuck sat on his doorstep dreaming and heard nothing.

Lipperty-lipperty-lip down the Lone Little Path came Peter Rabbit. He saw Johnny Chuck and he stopped long enough to pluck a long stem of grass. Then very, very softly he stole up behind Johnny Chuck. Reaching out with the long stem of grass, he tickled one of Johnny Chuck's ears.

Johnny Chuck slapped at his ear with a little black hand, for he thought a fly was bothering him, just as Peter Rabbit meant that he should. Peter tickled the other ear. Johnny Chuck shook his head and slapped at this with the other little black hand. Peter almost giggled.

He sat still a few minutes, then tickled Johnny Chuck again. Johnny slapped three or four times at the imaginary fly. This time Peter clapped both hands over his mouth to keep from laughing.

Once more he tickled Johnny Chuck. This time Johnny jumped clear off his doorstep. Peter laughed before he could clap his hands over his mouth. Of course Johnny

Chuck heard him and whirled about. When he saw Peter Rabbit and the long stem of grass he laughed, too.

"Hello, Peter Rabbit! You fooled me that time. Where 'd you come from?" asked Johnny Chuck.

"Down the Lone Little Path from the Crooked Little Path and down the Crooked Little Path from the top of the Hill," replied Peter Rabbit.

Then they sat down side by side on Johnny Chuck's doorstep to watch Reddy Fox hunting for his dinner on the Green Meadows.

Pretty soon they heard Blacky the Crow cawing very loudly. They could see him on the tip-top of a big pine in the Green Forest on the edge of the Green Meadows.

"Caw, caw, caw," shouted Blacky the Crow, at the top of his lungs.

In a few minutes they saw all of Blacky 's aunts and uncles and cousins flying over to join Blacky at the big pine in the midst of the Green Forest. Soon there was a big crowd of crows around the big pine, all talking at once. Such a racket! Such a dreadful racket! Every few minutes one of them would fly into the big pine and yell at the top of his lungs. Then all would caw together. Another would fly into the big pine and they would do it all over again.

Peter Rabbit began to get interested, for you know Peter has a very great deal of curiosity.

"Now I wonder what Blacky the Crow and his aunts and his uncles and his cousins are making such a fuss about," said Peter Rabbit.

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Johnny Chuck. "They seem to be having a good time, anyway. My gracious, how noisy they are! "

Just then along came Sammy Jay, who is, as you know, first cousin to Blacky the Crow. He was coming from the direction of the big pine.

"Sammy! Oh, Sammy Jay! What is all that fuss about over in the big pine?" shouted Peter Rabbit.

Sammy Jay stopped and carefully brushed his handsome blue coat, for Sammy Jay is something of a dandy. He appeared not to have heard Peter Rabbit.

"Sammy Jay, are you deaf?" inquired Peter Rabbit.

Now of course Sammy Jay had seen Peter Rabbit and Johnny Chuck all the time, but he looked up as if very much surprised to find them there.

"Oh, hello, Peter Rabbit!" said Sammy Jay. "Did you speak to me?

"No, oh, no," replied Peter Rabbit in disgust. "I was talking to myself, just thinking out loud. I was wondering how many nuts a Jay could steal if he had the chance."

Johnny Chuck chuckled and Sammy Jay looked foolish. He couldn't find a word to say, for he knew that all the little meadow people knew how he once was caught stealing Happy Jack's store of nuts.

"I asked what all that fuss over in the big pine is about," continued Peter Rabbit.

"Oh," said Sammy Jay, "my cousin, Blacky the Crow, found Hooty the Owl asleep over there, and now he and his aunts and his uncles and his cousins are having no end of fun with him. You know Hooty the Owl cannot see in the daytime very well, and they can do almost anything to him that they want to. It's great sport."

"I don't see any sport in making other people uncomfortable," said Johnny Chuck.

"Nor I," said Peter Rabbit. "I'd be ashamed to own a cousin like Blacky the Crow. I like people who mind their own affairs and leave other people alone."

Sammy Jay ran out his tongue at Peter Rabbit.

"You are a nice one to talk about minding other folk's affairs!" jeered Sammy Jay.

"Peter Rabbit's ears are long;
I wonder why! I wonder why!
Because to hear what others say
He's bound to try! he's bound to try."

It was Peter Rabbit's turn to look discomfited.

"Anyway, I don't try to bully and torment others and I don't steal," he retorted.

"Sammy Jay's a handsome chap
And wears a coat of blue.
I wonder if it's really his
Or if he stole that, too."

Just then Johnny Chuck's sharp eyes caught sight of something stealing along the edge of the Green Meadows toward the Green Forest and the big pine.

"There's Farmer Brown's boy with a gun," cried Johnny Chuck. "There's going to be trouble at the big pine if Blacky the Crow doesn't watch out. That's what comes of being so noisy."

Peter Rabbit and Sammy Jay stopped quarreling to look. Sure enough, there was Farmer Brown's boy with his gun. He had heard Blacky the Crow and his aunts and his

uncles and his cousins and he had hurried to get his gun, hoping to take them by surprise.

But Blacky the Crow has sharp eyes, too. Indeed, there are none sharper. Then, too, he is a mischief-maker. Mischief-makers are always on the watch lest they get caught in their mischief. So Blacky the Crow, sitting on the tip- top of the big pine, kept one eye out for trouble while he enjoyed the tormenting of Hooty the Owl by his aunts and his uncles and his cousins. He had seen Farmer Brown's boy even before Johnny Chuck had. But he couldn't bear to spoil the fun of tormenting Hooty the Owl, so he waited just as long as he dared. Then he gave the signal.

"Caw, caw, caw, caw!" shouted Blacky at the top of his lungs.

"Caw, caw, caw, caw!" replied all his aunts and uncles and cousins, rising into the air in a black cloud. Then, with Blacky in the lead, they flew over on to the Green Meadows, laughing and talking noisily as they went.

Farmer Brown's boy did not try to follow them, for he knew that it was of not the least bit of use. But he was curious to learn what the crows had been making such a fuss about, so he kept on towards the big pine.

Johnny Chuck watched him go. Suddenly he remembered Hooty the Owl, and that Hooty cannot see well in the daytime. Very likely Hooty would think that the crows had become tired of tormenting him and had gone off of their own accord. Farmer Brown's boy would find him there and then—Johnny Chuck shuddered as he thought of what might happen to Hooty the Owl.

"Run, Peter Rabbit, run as fast as you can down on the Green Meadows where the Merry Little Breezes are at play

and send one of them to tell Hooty the Owl that Farmer Brown's boy is corning with a gun to the big pine! Hurry, Peter, hurry!" cried Johnny Chuck.

Peter did not need to be told twice. He saw the danger of Hooty the Owl, and he started down the Lone Little Path on to the Green Meadows so fast that in a few minutes all Johnny Chuck and Sammy Jay could see of him was a little spot of white, which was the patch on the seat of Peter's pants, bobbing through the grass on the Green Meadows.

Johnny Chuck would have gone himself, but he is round and fat and roly-poly and cannot run fast, while Peter Rabbit's legs are long and meant for running. In a few minutes Johnny Chuck saw one of the Merry Little Breezes start for the big pine as fast as he could go. Johnny gave a great sigh of relief.

Farmer Brown's boy kept on to the big pine. When he got there he found no one there, for Hooty the Owl had heeded the warning of the Merry Little Breeze and had flown into the deepest, darkest part of the Green Forest, where not even the sharp eyes of Blacky the Crow were likely to find him.

And back on his doorstep Johnny Chuck chuckled to himself, for he was happy, was Johnny Chuck, happy because he possessed the best thing in the world, which is contentment.

And this is all I am going to tell you about the fuss in the big pine.

CHAPTER IX

JOHNNY CHUCK FINDS A USE FOR HIS BACK DOOR

Johnny Chuck sat in his doorway looking over the Green Meadows. He felt very fine. He had had a good breakfast in the sweet-clover patch. He had had a good nap on his own doorstep. By and by he saw the Merry Little Breezes of old Mother West Wind hurrying in his direction. They seemed in a very great hurry. They didn't stop to kiss the buttercups or tease the daisies. Johnny pricked up his small ears and watched them hurry up the hill.

"Good morning, Johnny Chuck," panted the first Merry Little Breeze to reach him, "have you heard the news?"

"What news," asked Johnny Chuck. The news about old Mother Chuck," replied the Merry Little Breezes.

Johnny shook his head.

"No," said he. "What is it?"

The Merry Little Breezes grew very, very sober.

"It is bad news," they replied.

"What is it? Tell me quick!" begged Johnny.

Just then Reddy Fox came hopping and skipping down the Lone Little Path.

"Hi, Johnny Chuck, have you heard the news?"

"No," said Johnny Chuck, "do tell me quick!"

Reddy Fox grinned maliciously, for Reddy likes to torment others. "It's about old Mrs. Chuck," said Reddy.

"I know that already," replied Johnny, "but, please, what is it?"

"Farmer Brown's boy has caught old Mrs. Chuck, and now I wouldn't wonder but what he will come up here and catch you," replied Reddy, turning a somersault.

Johnny Chuck grew pale. He had not seen Mother Chuck to speak to since he ran away from home. Now he was glad that he had run away, and yet sorry, oh, so sorry that anything had happened to Mrs. Chuck. Two big tears came into his eyes and ran down his funny little black nose. The Merry Little Breezes saw this, and one of them hurried over and whispered in Johnny Chuck's ear.

"Don't cry, Johnny Chuck," whispered the Merry Little Breeze. "Old Mother Chuck got away, and Farmer Brown's boy is still wondering how she did it."

Johnny's heart gave a great throb of relief. "I don't believe that Farmer Brown's boy will catch me," said Johnny Chuck, "for my house has two back doors."

Johnny Chuck awoke very early the next morning. He stretched and yawned and then just lay quietly enjoying himself for a few minutes. His bedchamber, way down underground, was snug and warm and very, very comfortable. By and by, Johnny Chuck heard a noise up by his front door.

"I wonder what is going on out there," said Johnny Chuck to himself, and jumping up, he tiptoed softly up the long hall until he had almost reached his doorway. Then he heard a voice which he had heard before, and it made little shivers run all over him. It was the voice of Granny Fox.

"So this is where that fat little Chuck has made his home," said Granny Fox. "Yes," replied another voice, "this is where Johnny Chuck lives, for I saw him here yesterday."

Johnny pricked up his ears, for that was the voice of Reddy Fox.

"Do you think he is in here now?" inquired Granny Fox.

"I am sure of it," replied Reddy, "for I have been watching ever since jolly, round, red Mr. Sun threw his nightcap off this morning, and Johnny Chuck has not put his nose out yet."

"Good," said Granny Fox, "I think fat Chuck will taste good for breakfast."

Johnny felt the cold shivers run over him again as he heard Granny Fox and Reddy Fox smack their lips. Then Granny Fox spoke again:

"You lie down behind that bunch of grass over there, Reddy, and I will lie down behind the old apple-tree. When he comes out, you just jump into his doorway and I will catch him before he can say Jack Robinson."

Johnny waited and listened and listened, but all was as still as still could be. Then Johnny Chuck tiptoed back along the hall to his bedroom and sat down to think. He felt sure that Granny Fox and Reddy were waiting for him, just as he had heard them plan.

"However am I going to know when they leave?" said Johnny Chuck to himself. Then he remembered the back doors which he had taken such care to make, and which Peter Rabbit had laughed at him for taking the trouble to make. He had hidden one so cunningly in the long grass

and had so carefully removed all sand from around it that he felt quite sure that no one had found it.

Very softly Johnny Chuck crept along the back passageway. Very, very cautiously he stuck his little black nose out the doorway and sniffed. Yes, he could smell foxes, but he knew that they were not at his back door. Little by little he crept out until he could peep through the grass. There lay Reddy Fox behind a big clump of grass, his eyes fixed on Johnny Chuck's front door, and there behind the apple-tree lay Granny Fox taking her ease, but all ready to jump when Reddy should give the word. Johnny Chuck almost giggled out loud as he saw how eagerly Reddy Fox was watching for him. Then Johnny Chuck had an idea that made him giggle harder. His black eyes snapped and he chuckled to himself.

Pretty soon along came Bumble the Bee, looking for honey. He came bustling and humming through the tall grass and settled on a dandelion right on the doorstep of Johnny Chuck's back door.

"Good morning," grumbled Bumble the Bee.

Johnny put a hand on his lips and beckoned Bumble to come inside.

Now Bumble the Bee is a gruff and rough fellow, but he is a good fellow, too, when you know him. Johnny Chuck had many times told him of places where the flowers grew thick and sweet, so when Johnny beckoned to him, Bumble came at once.

"Will you do something for me, Bumble?" whispered Johnny Chuck.

"Of course, I will," replied Bumble, in his gruff voice. "What is it?"

Then Johnny Chuck told Bumble the Bee how Granny and Reddy Fox were waiting for him to come out for his breakfast and how they had planned to gobble him up for their own breakfast. Bumble the Bee grew very indignant.

"What do you want me to do, Johnny Chuck?" he asked. "If I can help you, just tell me how."

Johnny whispered something to Bumble the Bee, and Bumble laughed right out loud. Then he buzzed up out of the doorway, and Johnny crept up to watch. Straight over to where Reddy Fox was squatting behind the clump of grass flew Bumble the Bee, so swiftly that Johnny could hardly see him. Suddenly Reddy gave a yelp and sprang into the air. Johnny Chuck clapped both hands over his mouth to keep from laughing out loud, for you see Bumble the Bee had stuck his sharp little lance into one of the ears of Reddy Fox.

Granny Fox looked up and scowled. "Keep still," she whispered.

Just then Reddy yelped louder than before, for Bumble had stung him in the other ear.

"What's the matter?" snapped Granny Fox.

"I don't know," cried Reddy Fox, hanging on to both ears.

"You are . . ." began Granny Fox, but Johnny Chuck never knew what she was going to say Reddy Fox was, for you see just then Bumble the Bee thrust his sharp little lance into one of her ears, and before she could turn around he had done the same thing to the other ear.

Granny Fox didn't wait for any more. She started off as fast as she could go, with Reddy Fox after her, and every few steps they rubbed their ears and shook their heads as if they thought they could shake out the pain.

CHAPTER X

BILLY MINK GOES DINNERLESS

Down the Laughing Brook came Billy Mink. He was feeling very good that morning, was Billy Mink, pleased with the world in general and with himself in particular. When he reached the Smiling Pool he swam out to the Big Rock. Little Joe Otter was already there, and not far away, lazily floating, with his head and back out of water, was Jerry Muskrat.

"Hello, Billy Mink," cried Little Joe Otter.

"Hello yourself," replied Billy Mink, with a grin.

"Where are you going?" asked Little Joe Otter.

"Nowhere in particular," replied Billy Mink.

"Let's go fishing down to the Big River," said Little Joe Otter.

"Let's!" cried Billy, diving from the highest point on the Big Rock.

So off they started across the Green Meadows towards the Big River. Half way there they met Reddy Fox.

"Hello, Reddy! Come on with us to the Big River, fishing," called Billy Mink.

Now Reddy Fox is no fisherman, though he likes fish to eat well enough. He remembered the last time he went fishing and how Billy Mink had laughed at him when he fell into the Smiling Pool. He was just about to say "no" when he changed his mind.



"Come on with us to the big river, fishing,"
called Billy Mink.

"All right, I'll go," said Reddy Fox.

So the three of them raced merrily across the Green Meadows until they came to the Big River. Now Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter are famous fishermen and can swim even faster than the fish themselves. But Reddy Fox is a poor swimmer and must depend upon his wits. When they reached the bank of the Big River they very carefully crawled down to a sandy beach. There, just a little way out from shore, a school of little striped perch were at play. Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter prepared to dive in and each grab a fish, but Reddy Fox knew that he could not swim well enough for that.

"Wait a minute," whispered Reddy. "Billy Mink, you go up the river a little way and swim out beyond where the fish are at play. Little Joe Otter, you go down the river a little way and swim out to join Billy Mink. Then both together rush in as fast as you can swim. The fish will be so frightened they will rush in where the water is shallow. Of course you will each catch one, anyway, and perhaps I may be so lucky as to catch one in the shallow water."

Billy Mink and little Joe Otter agreed, and did just as Reddy Fox had told them to. When they were between the playing fish and deep water they started in with a rush. The little striped perch were young and foolish. When they saw Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter they rushed madly away from them without looking to see where they were going to. As Reddy Fox had foreseen would be the case, a lot of them became stranded where the water was too shallow for swimming, and there they jumped and flapped helplessly.

Reddy was waiting for them and in a twinkling his little black paw had scooped half a dozen fish high and dry on the beach. Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter were too busy

watching the fish to see what Reddy was doing. He had caught six fish and these he hid under a log. When Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter swam ashore, Reddy was the picture of disappointment, for he had nothing to show, while the others each had a plump little fish.

"Never mind," said Little Joe Otter, "I'll give you the next one I catch."

But Billy Mink jeered at Reddy Fox. "Pooh! you're no fisherman, Reddy Fox! If I couldn't catch fish when they are chased right into my hands I'd never go fishing."

Reddy Fox pretended to be indignant. "I tell you what, Billy Mink," said he, "if I don't catch more fish than you do to-day I'll bring you the plumpest chicken in Farmer Brown's dooryard, but if I do catch more fish than you do you will give me the biggest one you catch. Do you agree?"

Now Billy Mink is very fond of plump chicken and here was a chance to get one without danger of meeting Bowser the Hound, who guards Farmer Brown's chickens. So Billy Mink agreed to give Reddy Fox the biggest fish he caught that day if Reddy could show more fish than he could at the end of the day.

All the time he chuckled to himself, for you know Billy Mink is a famous fisherman, and he knew that Reddy Fox is a poor swimmer and does not like the water.

By and by they came to another sandy beach like the first one. They could see another school of foolish young fish at play. As before, Reddy Fox remained on shore while the others swam out and drove the fish in. As before Reddy caught half a dozen, while Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter each caught one this time. Reddy hid five and then pretended to be so tickled over catching one, the smallest of the lot, that Billy Mink didn't once suspect a trick.

Two or three times more Reddy Fox repeated this. Then he discovered a big pickerel sunning himself beside an old log floating in deep water. Reddy couldn't catch Mr. Pickerel, for the water was deep. What should he do? Reddy sat down to think. Finally he thought of a plan. Very cautiously he backed away so as not to scare the big fish. Then he called Billy Mink. When Billy saw the big pickerel, his mouth watered, too, and his little black eyes sparkled.

Very quietly Billy slipped into the water back of the old log. There was not so much as a ripple to warn the big pickerel. Drawing a long breath, Billy dived under the log, and coming up under the big pickerel, seized it by the middle. There was a tremendous thrashing and splashing, and then Billy Mink swam ashore and proudly laid the big fish on the bank.

"Don't you wish it was yours?" asked Billy Mink.

"It ought to be mine, for I saw it first," said Reddy Fox.

"But you didn't catch it and I did," retorted Billy Mink. "I'm going to have it for my dinner. My, but I do like fat pickerel!" Billy smacked his lips.

Reddy Fox said nothing, but tried his best to look disappointed and dejected. All the time he was chuckling inwardly.

For the rest of the day the fishing was poor. Just as Old Mother West Wind started for the Green Meadows to take her children, the Merry Little Breezes, to their home behind the Purple Hills, the three little fishermen started to count up their catch. Then Reddy brought out all the fish that he had hidden. When they saw the pile of fish Reddy Fox had, Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter were so surprised that their eyes popped out and their jaws

dropped. Very foolish they looked, very foolish indeed, for Reddy had four times as many as either of them.

Reddy walked over to the big pickerel and picking it up, carried it over to his pile. "What are you doing with my fish?" shouted Billy Mink angrily.

"It isn't yours, it's mine!" retorted Reddy Fox.

Billy Mink fairly danced up and down he was so angry. "It's not yours!" he shrieked. "It's mine, for I caught it!"

"And you agreed that your biggest fish should be mine if I caught more fish than you did. I've caught four times as many, so the pickerel is mine," retorted Reddy, winking at Little Joe Otter.

Then Billy Mink did a very foolish thing; he lost his temper completely. He called Reddy Fox bad names. But he did not dare try to take the big pickerel away from Reddy, for Reddy is much bigger than he. Finally he worked himself into such a rage that he ran off home leaving his pile of fish behind.

Reddy Fox and Little Joe Otter took care not to touch Billy Mink's fish, but Reddy divided his big pile with Little Joe Otter. Then they, too, started for home, Reddy carrying the big pickerel.

Late that night, when he had recovered his temper, Billy Mink began to grow hungry. The more he thought of his fish the hungrier he grew. Finally he could stand it no longer and started for the Big River to see what had become of his fish. He reached the strip of beach where he had so foolishly left them just in time to see the last striped perch disappear down the long throat of Mr. Night Heron.

And this is how it happened that Billy Mink went dinnerless to bed. But he had learned three things, had Billy, and he never forgot them - that wit is often better

than skill; that it is not only mean but is very foolish to sneer at another; and that to lose one's temper is the most foolish thing in the world.

CHAPTER XI

GRANDFATHER FROG'S JOURNEY

GRANDFATHER FROG sat on his big green lily-pad in the Smiling Pool and - Grandfather Frog was asleep! There was no doubt about it, Grandfather Frog was really and truly asleep. His hands were folded across his white and yellow waistcoat and his eyes were closed. Three times the Merry Little Breezes blew a foolish green fly right past his nose; - - Grandfather Frog didn't so much as blink.

Presently Billy Mink discovered that Grandfather Frog was asleep. Billy's little black eyes twinkled with mischief as he hurried over to the slippery slide in search of Little Joe Otter. Then the two scamps hunted up Jerry Muskrat. They found him very busy storing away a supply of food in his new house. At first Jerry refused to listen to what they had to say, but the more they talked the more Jerry became interested.

"We won't hurt Grandfather Frog, not the least little bit," protested Billy Mink. "It will be just the best joke and the greatest fun ever, and no harm done."

The more Jerry thought over Billy Mink's plan, the funnier the joke seemed. Finally Jerry agreed to join Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter. Then the three put their heads together and with a lot of giggling and chuckling they planned their joke on Grandfather Frog.

Now Jerry Muskrat can stay a very long time under water, and his teeth are long: and sharp in order to cut the

roots on which he depends for much of his food. So Jerry swam out to the big green lily-pad on which sat Grandfather Frog fast asleep. Diving way to the bottom of the Smiling Pool, Jerry cut off the stem of the big green lily-pad close to its root way down in the mud.

While Jerry was at work doing this, Billy Mink sent the Merry Little Breezes hurrying over the Green Meadows to call all the little meadow people to the Smiling Pool. Then, when Jerry Muskrat came up for a breath of air, Billy Mink dived down and, getting hold of the end of the lily-pad stem, he began to swim, towing the big green lily-pad after him very slowly and gently so as not to waken Grandfather Frog. When Billy had to come up for air, Little Joe Otter took his place. Then Jerry Muskrat took his turn.

Across the Smiling Pool, past the Big Rock, they towed the big green lily-pad, while Grandfather Frog slept peacefully, his hands folded over his white and yellow waistcoat. Past the bulrushes and Jerry Muskrat's new house, past Little Joe Otter's slippery slide sailed Grandfather Frog, and still he slept and dreamed of the days when the world was young.

Out of the Smiling Pool and into the Laughing Brook, where the brown water flows smoothly, the three little swimmers towed the big green lily-pad. It floated along of itself now, and all they had to do was to steer it clear of rocks and old logs. Once it almost got away from them, on the edge of a tiny waterfall, but all three pulling together towed it out of danger. At last, in a dear little pool with a mossy green bank, they anchored the big green lily-pad.

Then Billy Mink hurried back to the Smiling Pool to tell the little meadow people where to find Grandfather Frog.

Little Joe Otter climbed out on the mossy green bank and Jerry Muskrat joined him there to rest and dry off. One by one the little meadow people came hurrying up. Reddy Fox was the first. Then came Johnny Chuck and Striped Chipmunk. Of course Peter Rabbit was on hand. You can always count Peter in, when there is anything going on among the little meadow people. Danny Meadow Mouse and Happy Jack Squirrel arrived quite out of breath. Sammy Jay and Blacky the Crow were not far behind. Last of all came Jimmy Skunk, who never hurries.

Each in turn peeped over the edge of the mossy green bank to see Grandfather Frog still sleeping peacefully on his big green lily-pad in the dear little pool. Then all hid where they could see him when he awoke, but where he could not see them. Presently Billy Mink reached out with a long straw and tickled Grandfather Frog on the end of his nose. Grandfather Frog opened his eyes and yawned sleepily. Right over his head he saw jolly, round, red Mr. Sun smiling down on him just as he last saw him before falling asleep. He yawned again and then looked to see if Billy Mink was sitting on the Big Rock.

Where was the Big Rock? Grandfather Frog sat up very suddenly and rubbed his eyes. There wasn't any Big Rock! Grandfather Frog pinched himself to make sure that he was awake.

Then he rubbed his eyes again and looked down at the big green lily-pad. Yes, that was his, the very same lily-pad on which he sat every day.

Grandfather Frog was more perplexed than ever. Slowly he looked around. Where were the slippery slide and Jerry Muskrat's new house? Where were the bulrushes and where - - where was the Smiling Pool? Grandfather

Frog's jaw dropped as he looked about him. His own big green lily-pad was the only lily-pad in sight. Had the world turned topsy-turvy while he slept?

"Chug-a-rum!" said Grandfather Frog. "This is very strange, very strange, indeed! '

Then he turned around three times and pinched himself again. "Very strange, very strange, indeed," muttered Grand- father Frog over and over again. He scratched his head first with one hand and then with the other, and the more he scratched the stranger it all seemed.

Just then he heard a giggle up on the mossy green bank. Grandfather Frog whirled around. "Chug-a-rum!" he exclaimed. "Billy Mink, come out from behind that tall grass and tell me where I am and what this means! I might have known that you were at the bottom of it."

Then out jumped all the little meadow people and the Merry Little Breezes to shout and laugh and dance and roll over and over on the mossy green bank. Grandfather Frog looked at one and then at another and gradually he began to smile. Pretty soon he was laughing as hard as any of them, as Billy Mink told how they had towed him down to the dear little pool.

"And now, Grandfather Frog, we'll take you home again," concluded Billy Mink.

So, as before, Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter and Jerry Muskrat took turns towing the big green lily-pad, while in the middle of it sat Grandfather Frog, catching foolish green flies which the Merry Little Breezes blew over to him.

Reddy Fox, Johnny Chuck, Peter Rabbit, Danny Meadow Mouse, Striped Chipmunk, Happy Jack Squirrel and Jimmy Skunk raced and capered along the bank and shouted encouragement to the three little swimmers, while

overhead flew Sammy Jay and Blacky the Crow. And, never once losing his balance, Grandfather Frog sat on the big green lily-pad, enjoying his strange ride and smacking his lips over the foolish green flies.

And so they came once more to the Smiling Pool, past the slippery slide, past the bulrushes and Jerry Muskrat's new house and the Big Rock, until Grandfather Frog and his queer craft were once more anchored safe and sound in the old familiar place.

"Chug-a-rum!" said Grandfather Frog. "I think I'd like to go again."

CHAPTER XII

WHY BLACKY THE CROW WEARS MOURNING

GRANDFATHER FROG sat on his big green lily-pad in the Smiling Pool. Grandfather Frog felt very good that morning, very good indeed, because why, because his white and yellow waistcoat was full of foolish green flies. It is doubtful, very, very doubtful if Grandfather Frog could have swallowed another foolish green fly to save his life. So he sat with his hands folded across his white and yellow waistcoat, and into his eyes, his great goggly eyes, there crept a far, far, far away look. Grand- father Frog was dreaming of the days when the world was young and the frogs ruled the world.

Pretty soon the Merry Little Breezes of Old Mother West Wind came over to the Smiling Pool to rock Mrs. Redwing's babies to sleep in their cradle in the bulrushes. But when they saw Grandfather Frog they forgot all about Mrs. Redwing and her babies.

"Good morning, Grandfather Frog!" they shouted.

Grandfather Frog awoke from his dream with a funny little jump.

"Goodness, how you startled me!" said Grandfather Frog, smoothing down his white and yellow waistcoat.

The Merry Little Breezes giggled. "We didn't mean to, truly we didn't," said the merriest one of all. "We just

wanted to know how you do this fine morning, and - - and -

"Chug-a-rum," said Grandfather Frog, "you want me to tell you a story."

The Merry Little Breezes giggled again. "How did you ever guess it?" they cried. "It must be because you are so very, very wise. Will you tell us a story, Grandfather Frog? Will you please?"

Grandfather Frog looked up and winked one big, goggly eye at jolly, round, red Mr. Sun, who was smiling down from the blue sky. Then he sat still so long that the Merry Little Breezes began to fear that Grandfather Frog was out of sorts and that there would be no story that morning. They fidgeted about among the bulrushes and danced back and forth across the lily-pads. They had even begun to think again of Mrs. Redwing's babies.

"Chug-a-rum!" said Grandfather Frog suddenly. "What shall I tell you about?"

Just then a black shadow swept across the Smiling Pool. "Caw, caw, caw, caw!" shouted Blacky the Crow noisily. as he flew over toward Farmer Brown's cornfield.

"Tell us why Blacky the Crow always wears a coat of black, as if he were in mourning," shouted the Merry Little Breezes.

Grandfather Frog watched Blacky disappear behind the Lone Pine. Then, when the Merry Little Breezes had settled down, each in the golden heart of a white water-lily, he began:

"Once upon a time, when the world was young, old Mr. Crow, the grandfather a thousand times removed of Blacky, whom you all know, lived in the Green Forest on

the edge of the Green Meadows, just as Blacky does now, and with him lived his brothers and sisters, his uncles and aunts, his cousins and all his poor relations.

"Now Mr. Crow was very smart. Indeed, he was the smartest of all the birds. There wasn't anything that old Mr. Crow couldn't do or didn't know. At least he thought there wasn't. All the little meadow people and forest folks began to think so, too, and one after another they got in the habit of coming to him for advice, until pretty soon they were bringing all their affairs to Mr. Crow for settlement.

"Now for a while Mr. Crow showed great wisdom, and this so: pleased Old Mother Nature that she gave him a suit of pure, dazzling white, so that all seeing him might look up to him as a shining example of wisdom and virtue. Of course all his brothers and sisters, his uncles and aunts, his cousins and all his poor relations at once put on white, that all might know that they were of Mr. Crow's family. And of course every one showed them the greatest attention out of respect to old Mr. Crow, so that presently they began to hold their heads very high and to think that because they were related to old Mr. Crow they were a little better than any of the other little meadow people and forest folks. When they met old Mr. Rabbit they would pretend not to see him, because he wore a white patch on the seat of his trousers. When old Mr. Woodchuck said 'good morning,' they would pretend not to hear, for you know Mr. Woodchuck wore a suit of dingy yellow and lived in a hole in the ground. Old Mr. Toad was ugly to look upon. Besides, he worked for his living in a garden. So when they happened to meet him on the road they always turned their backs.

"For a long time old Mr. Crow himself continued to be a very fine gentleman and to hold the respect of all his neighbors. He was polite to every one, and to all who came to him he freely gave of his advice as wisely as he knew how. Of course it wasn't long before he knew all about his neighbors and their private affairs. Now it isn't safe to know too much about your neighbors and what they are doing. It is dangerous knowledge, very dangerous knowledge indeed," said Grandfather Frog solemnly. "To be sure it would have been safe enough," he continued, "if Mr. Crow had kept it to himself. But after a while Mr. Crow became vain. Yes, Sir, that is just what happened to old Mr. Crow - - he became vain. He liked to feel that all the little meadow people and forest folks looked up to him with respect, and whenever he saw one of them coming he would brush his white coat, swell himself up and look very important. After a while he began to brag among his relatives of how much he knew about his neighbors. Of course they were very much interested, very much interested indeed, and this flattered Mr. Crow so that almost before he knew it he was telling some of the private affairs which had been brought to him for his advice. Oh, dear me, Mr. Crow began to gossip.

"Now, gossiping is one of the worst habits in all the world, one of the very worst. No good ever comes of it. It just makes trouble, trouble, trouble. It was so now. Mr. Crow's relatives repeated the stories that they heard. But they took great care that no one should know where they came from. My, my, my, how trouble did spread on the Green Meadows and in the Green Forest! No one suspected old Mr. Crow, so he was more in demand than ever to straighten matters out. His neighbors came to him

so much that they began to be ashamed to ask his advice for nothing, so they brought him presents so that no more need Mr. Crow hunt for things to eat. Instead, he lived on the fat of the land without working, and grew fat and lazy.

"As I have told you, Mr. Crow was smart. Yes, indeed, he certainly was smart. It did not take him long to see that the more trouble there was among his neighbors the more they would need his advice, and the more they needed his advice the more presents he would receive. He grew very crafty. He would tell tales just to make trouble, and sometimes, when he saw a chance, he would give advice that he knew would make more trouble. The fact is, old Mr. Crow became a mischief-maker, the very worst kind of a mischief-maker. And all the time he appeared to be the fine gentleman that he used to be. He wore his fine white coat as proudly as ever.

"Matters grew worse and worse. Never had there been so much trouble on the Green Meadows or so many quarrels in the Green Forest. Old Mr. Mink never met old Mr. Otter without picking a fight. Old Mrs. Skunk wouldn't speak to old Mrs. Coon. Old Mr. Chipmunk turned his back on his cousin, old Mr. Red Squirrel, whenever their paths crossed.

Even my grandfather a thousand times removed, old Mr. Frog, refused to see his nearest relative, old Mr. Toad. And all the time old Mr. Crow wore his beautiful suit of white and grew rich and fat, chuckling to himself over his ill-gotten wealth.

"Then one day came Old Mother Nature to visit the Green Meadows. It didn't take her long to find that something was wrong, very wrong indeed. Old Mr. Crow and all his relatives hastened to pay their, respects and to

tell her how much they appreciated their beautiful white suits. Old Mr. Crow made a full report of all the troubles that had been brought to him, but he took great care not to let her know that he had had any part in making trouble. He looked very innocent, oh, very, very innocent, but not once did he look her straight in the face.

"Now the eyes of Old Mother Nature are wonderfully sharp and they seemed to bore right through old Mr. Crow. You can't fool Old Mother Nature. No, Sir, you can't fool Old Mother Nature, and it's of no use to try. She listened to all that Mr. Crow had to say. Then she sent Mr. North Wind to blow his great trumpet and call together all the little people of the Green Meadows and all the little folks of the Green Forest.

"When they had all come together she told them all that had happened. She told just how Mr. Crow had started the stories in order to make trouble so that they would seek his advice and bring him presents to pay for it. When the neighbors of old Mr. Crow heard this they were very angry, and they demanded of Old Mother Nature that Mr. Crow be punished.

"'Look!' said Old Mother Nature, pointing at old Mr. Crow. 'He has been punished already,'

"Every one turned to look at Mr. Crow. At first they hardly knew him. Instead of his suit of spotless white his clothes were black, as black as the blackest night. So were the clothes of his uncles and aunts, his brothers and sisters, his cousins and all his poor relations.

"And ever since that long-ago day, when the world was young, the Crows have been mischief-makers and have worn black, that all who look may know that they bring nothing but trouble," concluded Grandfather Frog.

"Thank you! Thank you, Grandfather Frog," shouted the Merry Little Breezes, jumping up to go rock the Redwing babies.

"Caw, caw, caw, caw!" shouted Blacky the Crow, flying over their heads with a mouthful of corn he had stolen from Farmer Brown's cornfield.

CHAPTER XIII

STRIPED CHIPMUNK FOOLS PETER RABBIT

Peter Rabbit sat at the top of the Crooked Little Path where it starts down the hill. He was sitting there when jolly, round, red Mr. Sun threw his nightcap off and began his daily climb up into the blue, blue sky. He saw Old Mother West Wind hurry down from the Purple Hills and turn her Merry Little Breezes out to play on the Green Meadows.

Peter yawned. The fact is, Peter had been out nearly all night, and now he didn't know just what to do with himself. Presently he saw Striped Chipmunk whisk up on top of an old log. As usual the pockets in Striped Chipmunk's cheeks were stuffed so full that his head looked to be twice as big as it really is, and as usual he seemed to be very busy, very busy indeed. He stopped just long enough to wink one of his saucy black eyes and shout: "Good morning, Peter Rabbit!"

Then he disappeared as suddenly as he had come. A few minutes later he was back on the old log, but this time his cheeks were empty.

"Fine day, Peter Rabbit," said Striped Chipmunk, and whisked out of sight.

Peter Rabbit yawned again. Then he closed his eyes for just a minute. When he opened them there was Striped Chipmunk on the old log just as before, and the pockets

in both cheeks were so full that it seemed as if they would burst.

"Nice morning to work, Peter Rabbit," said Striped Chipmunk, in spite of his full cheeks. Then he was gone.

Once more Peter Rabbit closed his eyes, but hardly were they shut when Striped Chipmunk shouted:

"Oh, you Peter Rabbit, been out all night?"

Peter snapped his eyes open just in time to see the funny little tail of Striped Chipmunk vanish over the side of the old log. Peter scratched one of his long ears and yawned again, for Peter was growing more and more sleepy. It was a long yawn, but Peter cut it off right in the middle, for there was Striped Chipmunk back on the old log, and both pockets in his cheeks were stuffed full.

Now Peter Rabbit is as curious as he is lazy, and you know he is very, very lazy. The fact is, Peter Rabbit's curiosity is his greatest fault, and it gets him into a great deal of trouble. It is because of this and the bad, bad habit of meddling in the affairs of other people into which it has led him that Peter Rabbit has such long ears.

For a while Peter watched busy Striped Chipmunk. Then he began to wonder what Striped Chipmunk could be doing. The more he wondered the more he felt that he really must know. The next time Striped Chipmunk appeared on the old log, Peter shouted to him.

"Hi, Striped Chipmunk, what are you so busy about? Why don't you play a little?"

Striped Chipmunk stopped a minute. "I'm building a new house," said he.

"Where?" asked Peter Rabbit.

"That's telling," replied Striped Chipmunk, and whisked out of sight.

Now Peter Rabbit knew where Reddy Fox and Jimmy Skunk and Bobby Coon and Happy Jack Squirrel and Johnny Chuck and Danny Meadow Mouse lived. He knew all the little paths leading to their homes. But he did not know where Striped Chipmunk lived. He never had known. He thought of this as he watched Striped Chipmunk hurrying back and forth. The more he thought of it the more curious he grew. He really must know. Pretty soon along came Jimmy Skunk, looking for some beetles.

"Hello, Jimmy Skunk," said Peter Rabbit.

"Hello, Peter Rabbit," said Jimmy Skunk.

"Do you know where Striped Chipmunk lives?" asked Peter Rabbit.

"No, I don't know where Striped Chipmunk lives, and I don't care; it's none of my business," replied Jimmy Skunk. "Have you seen any beetles this morning?"

Peter Rabbit hadn't seen any beetles, so Jimmy Skunk went on down the Crooked Little Path, still looking for his breakfast.

By and by along came Johnny Chuck.

"Hello, Johnny Chuck!" said Peter Rabbit.

"Hello, yourself!" said Johnny Chuck.

"Do you know where Striped Chipmunk lives?" asked Peter Rabbit.

"No, I don't, for it's none of my business," said Johnny Chuck, and started on down the Crooked Little Path to the Green Meadows.

Then along came Bobby Coon.

"Hello, Bobby Coon!" said Peter Rabbit.

"Hello!" replied Bobby Coon shortly, for he too had been out all night and was very sleepy.

"Do you know where Striped Chipmunk lives?" asked Peter Rabbit.

"Don't know and don't want to; it's none of my business," said Bobby Coon even more shortly than before, and started on for his hollow chestnut tree to sleep the long, bright day away.

Peter Rabbit could stand it no longer. Curiosity had driven away all desire to sleep. He simply had to know where Striped Chipmunk lived.

"I'll just follow Striped Chipmunk and see for myself where he lives," said Peter to himself.

So Peter Rabbit hid behind a tuft of grass close by the old log and sat very, very still. It was a very good place to hide, a very good place. Probably if Peter Rabbit had not been so brimming over with curiosity he would have succeeded in escaping the sharp eyes of Striped Chipmunk. But people full of curiosity are forever pricking up their ears to hear things which do not in the least concern them. It was so with Peter Rabbit. He was so afraid that he would miss something that both his long ears were standing up straight, and they came above the grass behind which Peter Rabbit was hiding.

Of course Striped Chipmunk saw them the very instant he jumped up on the old log with both pockets in his cheeks stuffed full. He didn't say a word, but his sharp little eyes twinkled as he jumped off the end of the old log and scurried along under the bushes, for he guessed what Peter Rabbit was hiding for, and though he did not once turn his head he knew that Peter was following him. You see Peter runs with big jumps, lipperty-lipperty-lip, and people who jump must make a noise.

So, though he tried very hard not to make a sound, Peter was in such a hurry to keep Striped Chipmunk in sight that he really made a great deal of noise. The more noise Peter made, the more Striped Chipmunk chuckled to himself.

Presently Striped Chipmunk stopped. Then he sat up very straight and looked this way and looked that way, just as if trying to make sure that no one was watching him. Then he emptied two pocketfuls of shining yellow gravel on to a nice new mound which he was building. Once more he sat up and looked this way and looked that way. Then he scuttled back towards the old log. As he ran Striped Chipmunk chuckled and chuckled to himself, for all the time he had seen Peter Rabbit lying flat down behind a little bush and knew that Peter Rabbit was thinking to himself how smart he had been to find Striped Chipmunk's home when no one else knew where it was.

No sooner was Striped Chipmunk out of sight than up jumped Peter Rabbit. He smiled to himself as he hurried over to the shining mound of yellow gravel. You see Peter's curiosity was so great that not once did he think how mean he was to spy on Striped Chipmunk.

"Now," thought Peter, "I know where Striped Chipmunk lives. Jimmy Skunk doesn't know. Johnny Chuck doesn't know. Bobby Coon doesn't know. But *I* know. Striped Chipmunk may fool all the others, but he can't fool me."

By this time Peter Rabbit had reached the shining mound of yellow gravel. At once he began to hunt for the doorway to Striped Chipmunk's home. But there wasn't any doorway. No, Sir, there wasn't any doorway! Look as he would, Peter Rabbit could not find the least sign of a

doorway. He walked 'round and 'round the mound and looked here and looked there, but not the least sign of a door was to be seen. There was nothing but the shining mound of yellow gravel, the green grass, the green bushes and the blue, blue sky, with jolly, round, red Mr. Sun looking down and laughing at him.

Peter Rabbit sat down on Striped Chipmunk's shining mound of yellow gravel and scratched his left ear with his left hindfoot. Then he scratched his right ear with his right hindfoot. It was very perplexing. Indeed, it was so perplexing that Peter quite forgot that Striped Chipmunk would soon be coming back.

Suddenly right behind Peter's back Striped Chipmunk spoke.

"How do you like my sand pile, Peter Rabbit? Don't you think it is a pretty nice sand pile?" asked Striped Chipmunk politely. And all the time he was chuckling away to himself.



Peter was so surprised that he nearly fell backward.

Peter was so surprised that he very nearly fell backward off the shining mound of yellow gravel. For a minute he didn't know what to say. Then he found his tongue.

"Oh," said Peter Rabbit, apparently in the greatest surprise, "is this your sand pile, Striped Chipmunk? It's a very nice sand pile indeed. Is this where you live?"

Striped Chipmunk shook his head. "No, oh, my, no!" said he. "I wouldn't think of living in such an exposed place! My goodness, no indeed! Everybody knows where this is. I'm building a new home, you know, and of course I don't want the gravel to clutter up my dooryard. So I've brought it all here. Makes a nice sand pile, doesn't it? You are very welcome to sit on my sand pile whenever you feel like it, Peter Rabbit. It's a good place to take a sun bath; I hope you'll come often."

All the time Striped Chipmunk was saying this his sharp little eyes twinkled with mischief and he chuckled softly to himself.

Peter Rabbit was more curious than ever. "Where is your new home, Striped Chipmunk?" he asked.

"Not far from here; come call on me," said Striped Chipmunk.

Then with a jerk of his funny little tail he was gone. It seemed as if the earth must have swallowed him up. Striped Chipmunk can move very quickly, and he had whisked out of sight in the bushes before Peter Rabbit could turn his head to watch him.

Peter looked behind every bush and under every stone, but nowhere could he find Striped Chipmunk or a sign of Striped Chipmunk's home, excepting the shining mound of yellow gravel. At last Peter pushed his inquisitive nose right into the doorway of Bumble the Bee. Now Bumble

the Bee happened to be at home, and being very short of temper, he thrust a sharp little needle into the inquisitive nose of Peter Rabbit.

"Oh! oh! oh!" shrieked Peter, clapping both hands to his nose, and started off home as fast as he could go.

And though he didn't know it and doesn't know it to this day, he went right across the doorstep of Striped Chipmunk's home. So Peter still wonders and wonders where Striped Chipmunk lives, and no one can tell him, not even the Merry Little Breezes. You see there is not even a sign of a path leading to his doorway, for Striped Chipmunk never goes or comes twice the same way. His doorway is very small, just large enough for him to squeeze through, and it is so hidden in the grass that often the Merry Little Breezes skip right over it without seeing it.

Every grain of sand and gravel from the fine long halls and snug chambers Striped Chipmunk has built underground he has carefully carried in the pockets in his cheeks to the shining mound of yellow gravel found by Peter Rabbit. Not so much as a grain is dropped on his doorstep to let his secret out.

So in and out among the little meadow people skips Striped Chipmunk all the long day, and not one has found out where he lives. But no one really cares excepting Peter Rabbit, who is still curious.

CHAPTER XIV

JERRY MUSKRAT'S NEW HOUSE

Jerry Muskrat wouldn't play. Billy Mink had tried to get him to. Little Joe Otter had tried to get him to. The Merry Little Breezes had tried to get him to. It was of no use, no use at all. Jerry Muskrat wouldn't play.

"Come on, Jerry, come on play with us," they begged all together.

But Jerry shook his head. "Can't," said he.

"Why not? Won't your mother let you? demanded Billy Mink, making a long dive into the Smiling Pool. He was up again in time to hear Jerry reply:

"Yes, my mother will let me. It isn't that. It's because we are going to have a long winter and a cold winter and I must prepare for it."

Every one laughed, every one except Great-Grandfather Frog, who sat on his big green lily-pad watching for foolish green flies.

"Pooh!" exclaimed Little Joe Otter. "A lot you know about it, Jerry Muskrat! Ho, ho, ho! A lot you know about it! Are you clerk of the weather? It is only fall now - - what can you know about what the winter will be? Oh come, Jerry Muskrat, don't pretend to be so wise. I can swim twice across the Smiling Pool while you are swimming across once come on!"

Jerry Muskrat shook his head. "Haven't time," said he. "I tell you we are going to have a long winter and a hard

winter, and I've got to prepare for it. When it comes you'll remember what I have told you,"

Little Joe Otter made a wry face and slid down his slippery slide, splash into the Smiling Pool, throwing water all over Jerry Muskrat, who was sitting on the end of a log close by. Jerry shook the water from his coat, which is waterproof, you know. Everybody laughed, that is, everybody but Grandfather Frog. He did not even smile.

"Chug - a - rum!" said Grandfather Frog, who is very wise. "Jerry Muskrat knows. If Jerry says that we are going to have a long cold winter you may be sure that he knows what he is talking about,"

Billy Mink turned a back somersault into the Smiling Pool so close to the big green lily-pad on which Grandfather Frog sat that the waves almost threw Grandfather Frog into the water.

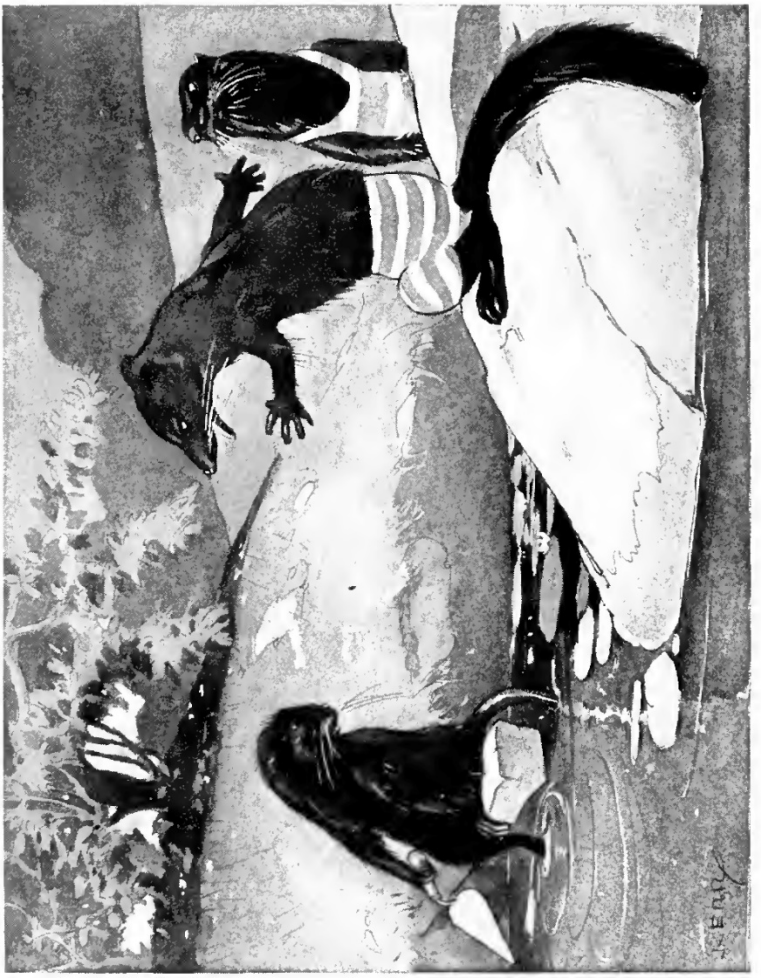
"Pooh," said Billy Mink, "how can Jerry Muskrat know anything more about it than we do?"

Grandfather Frog looked at Billy Mink severely. He does not like Billy Mink, who has been known to gobble up some of Grandfather Frog's children when he thought that no one was looking.

"Old Mother Nature was here and told him," said Grandfather Frog gruffly.

"Oh!" exclaimed Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter together. "That's different," and they looked at Jerry Muskrat with greater respect.

"How are you going to prepare for the long cold winter, Jerry Muskrat?" asked one of the Merry Little Breezes.



"I'm going to build a house," replied Jerry Muskrat.

"I'm going to build a house, a big, warm house," replied Jerry Muskrat, "and I'm going to begin right now."

Splash! Jerry had disappeared into the Smiling Pool. Presently, over on the far side where the water was shallow, it began to bubble and boil as if a great fuss was going on underneath the surface. Jerry Muskrat had begun work. The water grew muddy, very muddy indeed, so muddy that Little Joe Otter and Billy Mink climbed out on the Big Rock in disgust. When finally Jerry Muskrat swam out to rest on the end of a log they shouted to him angrily.

"Hi, Jerry Muskrat, you're spoiling our swimming water! What are you doing anyway?"

"I'm digging for the foundations for my new house, and it isn't your water any more than it's mine," replied Jerry Muskrat, drawing a long breath before he disappeared under water again.

The water grew muddier and muddier, until even Grandfather Frog began to look annoyed. Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter started off up the Laughing Brook, where the water was clear. The Merry Little Breezes danced away across the Green Meadows to play with Johnny Chuck, and Grandfather Frog settled himself comfortably on his big green lily-pad to dream of the days when the world was young and the frogs ruled the world.

But Jerry Muskrat worked steadily, digging and piling sods in a circle for the foundation of his house. In the center he dug out a chamber from which he planned a long tunnel to his secret burrow far away in the bank, and another to the deepest part of the Smiling Pool, where even in the coldest weather the water would not freeze to the bottom as it would do in the shallow places.

All day long while Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter and the Merry Little Breezes and Johnny Chuck and Peter Rabbit and Danny Meadow Mouse and all the other little meadow people were playing or lazily taking sun naps, Jerry Muskrat worked steadily. Jolly, round, red Mr. Sun, looking down from the blue, blue sky, smiled to see how industrious the little fellow was. That evening, when Old Mother West Wind hurried across the Green Meadows on her way to her home behind the Purple Hills, she found Jerry Muskrat sitting on the end of a log eating his supper of fresh-water clams. Showing just above the water on the edge of the Smiling Pool was the foundation of Jerry Muskrat's new house.

The next morning Jerry was up and at work even before Old Mother West Wind, who is a very early riser, came down from the Purple Hills. Of course every one was interested to see how the new house was coming along and to offer advice. "Are you going to build it all of mud?" asked one of the Merry Little Breezes.

"No," said Jerry Muskrat, "I'm going to use green alder twigs and willow shoots and bulrush stalks. It's going to be two stories high, with a room down deep under water and another room up above with a beautiful bed of grass and soft moss."

"That will be splendid!" cried the Merry Little Breezes.

Then one of them had an idea. He whispered to the other Little Breezes. They all giggled and clapped their hands. Then they hurried off to find Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter. They even hunted up Johnny Chuck and Peter Rabbit and Danny Meadow Mouse.

Jerry Muskrat was so busy that he paid no attention to any one or anything else. He was attending strictly to the

business of building a house that would keep him warm and comfortable when the long cold winter should freeze up tight the Smiling Pool.

Pretty soon he was ready for some green twigs to use in the walls of the new house. He swam across the Smiling Pool to the Laughing Brook, where the alders grow, to cut the green twigs which he needed. What do you think he found when he got there? Why, the nicest little pile of green twigs, all cut ready to use, and Johnny Chuck cutting more.

"Hello, Jerry Muskrat," said Johnny Chuck. "I've cut all these green twigs for your new house. I hope you can use them."

Jerry was so surprised that he hardly knew what to say. He thanked Johnny Chuck, and with the bundle of green twigs swam back to his new house. When he had used the last one he swam across to the bulrushes on the edge of the Smiling Pool.

"Good morning, Jerry Muskrat," said some one almost hidden by a big pile of bulrushes, all nicely cut. "I want to help build the new house."

It was Danny Meadow Mouse.

Jerry Muskrat was more surprised than ever. "Oh, thank you, Danny Meadow Mouse, thank you!" he said, and pushing the pile of bulrushes before him he swam back to his new house.

When he had used the rushes, Jerry wanted some young willow shoots, so he started for the place where the willows grow. Before he reached them he heard some one shouting:

"Hi, Jerry Muskrat! See the pile of willow shoots I've cut for your new house." It was Peter Rabbit, who is never known to work.

Jerry Muskrat was more surprised than ever and so pleased that all he could say was, "Thank you, thank you, Peter Rabbit!"

Back to the new house he swam with the pile of young willow shoots. When he had placed them to suit him he sat up on the walls of his house to rest. He looked across the Smiling Pool. Then he rubbed his eyes and looked again. Could it be - - yes, it certainly was a bundle of green alder twigs floating straight across the Smiling Pool towards the new house! When they got close to him Jerry spied a sharp little black nose pushing them along, and back of the little black nose twinkled two little black eyes.

"What are you doing with those alder twigs, Billy Mink?" cried Jerry.

"Bringing them for your new house," shouted Billy Mink, popping out from behind the bundle of alder twigs.

And that was the beginning of the busiest day that the Smiling Pool had ever known. Billy Mink brought more alder twigs and willow shoots and bulrushes as fast as Johnny Chuck and Peter Rabbit and Danny Meadow Mouse could cut them. Little Joe Otter brought sods and mud to hold them in place.

Thick and high grew the walls of the new house. In the upper part Jerry built the nicest little room, and lined it with grass and soft moss, so that he could sleep warm and comfortable through the long cold winter. Over all he built a strong, thick roof beautifully rounded.

An hour before it was time for Old Mother West Wind to come for the Merry Little Breezes, Jerry Muskrat's new

house was finished. Then such a frolic as there was in and around the Smiling Pool! Little Joe Otter made a new slippery slide down one side of the roof. Billy Mink said that the new house was better to dive off of than the Big Rock. Then the two of them, with Jerry Muskrat, cut up all sorts of monkeyshines in the water, while Johnny Chuck, Peter Rabbit, Danny Meadow Mouse and the Merry Little Breezes danced on the shore and shouted themselves hoarse. When at last jolly, round, red Mr. Sun went to bed behind the Purple Hills, and the black shadows crept ever so softly out across the Smiling Pool, Jerry Muskrat sat on the roof of his house eating his supper of fresh-water clams. He was very tired, was Jerry Muskrat, very tired indeed, but he was very happy, for now he had no fear of the long cold winter. Best of all his heart was full of love love for his little playmates of the Smiling Pool and the Green Meadows.

CHAPTER XV

PETER RABBIT'S BIG COUSIN

Jumper the Hare had come down out of the Great Woods to the Green Meadows. He is first cousin to Peter Rabbit, you know, and he looks just like Peter, only he is twice as big. His legs are twice as long and he can jump twice as far.

All the little meadow people were very polite to Jumper the Hare, all but Reddy Fox, who is never polite to any one unless he has a favor to ask. Peter Rabbit was very proud of his big cousin, very proud indeed. He showed Jumper the Hare all the secret paths in the Green Forest and across the Green Meadows. He took him to the Smiling Pool and the Laughing Brook, and everywhere Jumper the Hare was met with the greatest politeness.

But Jumper the Hare was timid, oh, very timid indeed. Every few jumps he sat up very straight to look this way and look that way, and to listen with his long ears. He jumped nervously at the least little noise. Yes, Sir, Jumper the Hare certainly was very timid.

"He's a coward!" sneered Reddy Fox.

And Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter and Jimmy Skunk, even Johnny Chuck, seeing Jumper the Hare duck and dodge at the shadow of Blacky the Crow, agreed with Reddy Fox. Still, they were polite to him for the sake of Peter Rabbit and because Jumper really was such a big, handsome fellow. But behind his back they laughed at

him. Even little Danny Meadow Mouse laughed. Now it happens that Jumper the Hare had lived all his life in the Great Woods, where Mr. Panther and Tufty the Lynx and fierce Mr. Fisher were always hunting him, but where the shadows were deep and where there were plenty of places to hide. Indeed, his whole life had been a game of hide and seek, and always he had been the one sought. So on the Green Meadows, where hiding places were few and far between, Jumper the Hare was nervous.

But the little meadow people, not knowing this, thought him a coward, and while they were polite to him they had little to do with him, for no one really likes a coward. Peter Rabbit, however, could see no fault in his big cousin. He showed him where Farmer Brown's tender young carrots grow, and the shortest way to the cabbage patch. He made him acquainted with all his own secret hiding places in the old brier patch.

Then one bright sunny morning something happened. Johnny Chuck saw it. Jimmy Skunk saw it. Happy Jack Squirrel saw it. Sammy Jay saw it. And they told all the others.

Very early that morning Reddy Fox had started out to hunt for his breakfast. He was tiptoeing softly along the edge of the Green Forest looking for wood mice when whom should he see but Peter Rabbit. Peter was getting his breakfast in the sweet-clover bed, just beyond the old brier patch.

Reddy Fox squatted down behind a bush to watch. Peter Rabbit looked plump and fat. Reddy Fox licked his chops. "Peter Rabbit would make a better breakfast than wood mice, a very much better breakfast," said Reddy Fox to himself. Beside, he owed Peter Rabbit a grudge. He had

not forgotten how Peter had tried to save his little brother from Reddy by bringing up Bowser the Hound.

Reddy Fox licked his chops again. He looked this way and he looked that way, but he could see no one watching. Old Mother West Wind had gone about her business. The Merry Little Breezes were over at the Smiling Pool to pay their respects to Great - Grandfather Frog. Even jolly, round, red Mr. Sun was behind a cloud. From his hiding place Reddy could not see Johnny Chuck or Jimmy Skunk or Happy Jack Squirrel or Sammy Jay. "No one will know what becomes of Peter Rabbit," thought Reddy Fox.

Very cautiously Reddy Fox crept out from behind the bush into the tall meadow grass. Flat on his stomach he crawled inch by inch. Every few minutes he stopped to listen and to peep over at the sweet-clover bed. There sat Peter Rabbit, eating, eating, eating the tender young clover as if he hadn't a care in the world but to fill his little round stomach.

Nearer and nearer crawled Reddy Fox. Now he was almost near enough to spring. "Thump, thump, thump!" The sound came from the brier patch.

"Thump, thump!"

This was Peter Rabbit hitting the ground with one of his hind feet. He had stopped eating and was sitting up very straight.

"Thump, thump, thump!" came the signal from the brier patch.

"Thump, thump!" responded Peter Rabbit, and started to run.

With a snarl Reddy Fox sprang after him. Then the thing happened. Reddy Fox caught a glimpse of something

going over him and at the same time he received a blow that rolled him over and over in the grass.

In an instant he was on his feet and had whirled about, his eyes yellow with anger. There right in front of him sat Jumper the Hare. Reddy Fox could hardly believe his own eyes! Could it be that Jumper the Hare, the coward, had dared to strike him such a blow? Reddy forgot all about Peter Rabbit. With a snarl he rushed at Jumper the Hare.

Then it happened again. As light as a feather Jumper leaped over him, and as he passed, those big hind legs, at which Reddy Fox had laughed, came back with a kick that knocked all the breath out of Reddy Fox.

Reddy Fox was furious. Twice more he sprang, and twice more he was sent sprawling, with the breath knocked out of his body. That was enough. Tucking his tail between his legs, Reddy Fox sneaked away towards the Green Forest. As he ran he heard Peter Rabbit thumping in the old brier patch.

"I'm safe," signaled Peter Rabbit. "Thump, thump, thump, thump! The coast is clear," replied Jumper the Hare.

Reddy Fox looked back from the edge of the Green Forest and gnashed his teeth. Peter Rabbit and Jumper the Hare were rubbing noses and contentedly eating tender young clover leaves.

"Now who's the coward?" jeered Sammy Jay from the top of the Lone Pine.

Reddy Fox said nothing, but slunk out of sight. Late that afternoon he sat on the hill at the top of the Crooked Little Path, and looked down on the Green Meadows. Over near the Smiling Pool were gathered all the little meadow people having the j oiliest time in the world.

While he watched they joined hands in a big circle and began to dance, Johnny Chuck, Jimmy Skunk, Bobby Coon, Little Joe Otter, Billy Mink, Happy Jack Squirrel, Striped Chipmunk, Danny Meadow Mouse, Peter Rabbit, Spotty the Turtle, even Great-Grand- father Frog and old Mr. Toad. And in the middle, sitting very straight, was Jumper the Hare.

And since that day Peter Rabbit has been prouder than ever of his big cousin, Jumper the Hare, for now no one calls him a coward.

THE END