WHILE THE STORY-LOG BURNS

THORNTON·W·BURGESS

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THE BIG
THORNTON BURGESS
Story-Book

WHILE THE STORY-LOG BURNS

By

Thornton W. Burgess

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TO ALL MY GRANDCHILDREN

and to all other children who love stories

these tales from Old Mother Nature

are dedicated.

FOREWORD

THERE are certain facts in connection with the stories in this volume that may be of interest to the reader. The Old House which furnishes the setting was built in 1742. For several years it has been my summer home. The hill immediately behind it is a splendid example of that peculiar formation made by deposits of gravel or sand by a subglacial stream and known as an esker. Laughing Brook flows along its base on the east. Several of the stories appeared years ago in the *Red Cross Magazine*, which, having served its purpose, ceased publication shortly after the World War. Other stories were published in the *People's Home Journal*. The stories told by the Old Hunter are true stories, actual incidents which occurred just as described and were furnished me by eyewitnesses. "The Joy of the Beautiful Pine" was written for the exercises with which my home city celebrated Christmas with its first municipal Christmas tree.

THE AUTHOR

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CHAPTER I

The Children's Hour

THE BARN OWL—Monkey-face the children called him—left the hollow oak far back on the ridge. On broad wings, as silently as one of his own downy feathers floating on still air, he drifted to his favorite perch, the top of a tall stub on the brow of Esker Hill. Since break of day he had slept. Now for a while he would sit here in idle comfort, his long wings lifted from his body ever so little, and his feathers slightly raised, in invitation to the languid breeze that feebly stirred the drooping leaves. And while he enjoyed his air bath he planned his night's hunting and watched what went on below. He missed no slightest movement within the range of his vision, and that range was surprisingly good for one who is commonly supposed to be half blind by day. It is a mistake to think that an owl must wait for dusk in order to see well.

Below him was the Old House, the roof gray-green with moss, the wide throat of the great chimney black with the smoke of two hundred years. That chimney was the source of endless curiosity and provocative speculation to the big owl. It was topped with a huge capstone. Beneath, one on each side, were four openings, vents for the smoke. To one seeking dark seclusion during the hours of daylight each was an open invitation to enter. Alas, each held a screen of wire mesh that barred the way.

It was the children's hour, that all too brief period at the close of day when time stands still and beyond the purpling hills the sinking sun holds back the curtain of the night. Like a benediction the hush of deep and tranquil peace lay over the land. On the eastern flank of Esker Hill the shadows gathered fast. Along its base for the whole length Laughing Brook rippled over pebbly shallows, gurgled around and under twisted old roots, or silently slipped beneath bending elder bushes weighed down by great clusters of rich wine-tinted fruit not yet fully ripe. In the cool blackness below, close to the bank, lay a trout waiting that which in time the water would bring him to satisfy his hunger.

At the end of the hill, as if minded to circle it, the brook began a turn, then

abruptly resumed its former course to make its laughing way down past the Old House and so under the road and through the broad meadow beyond. Here and there along the banks cardinal flowers burned in the gathering dusk like votive candles on the altar of the night.

Within the Old House a merry group was gathered around the broad hearth of the great fireplace that occupied all the middle of one side of the long low-studded living room, its great timbers always a source of wonder to guests who never before had crossed the hospitable threshold. Tonight was story night, the first of the season, and the Storyteller was counting noses.

"All here but Jimmy Andrews," said he. "I wonder if Jimmy isn't coming."

As if in answer the outer door opened and Jimmy entered. He was a bit breathless from running. His good-natured freckled face wore an engaging smile and his eyes danced with excitement. "Sorry I'm late," he panted. "As I was coming across the bridge I looked up the brook and there was old Lightfoot drinking. I just *had* to stop and watch him. It's the first time I've seen him this year. Gee, he's handsome! I hope the hunters don't get him this fall."

"I don't see how anyone can shoot a deer. I think it is wicked," mumbled Jean, her mouth full of popcorn.

"It does seem wicked to destroy any living thing as beautiful as Lightfoot," agreed the Storyteller. "We all hope with Jimmy that the hunters will never get him. He has been too smart for them in the past and we hope he will be too smart for them in the future. Was he still at the brook when you left, Jimmy?"

Jimmy's face grew a bit red. "No. I scared him," he confessed, then added hastily, "I guess he wasn't *really* scared, just kind of surprised. I wanted to see him run, so after I had watched him a while I hit the rail of the bridge with a stick and hollered at him. You ought to have seen him jump. His head and his tail both came up as if somehow they were hitched together, and when he saw me he cleared that brook in one jump right at the widest part. Then he bounded off in high jumps just as if he had springs in his feet or landed on a springboard each time. After a few jumps he stopped and turned to stare at me. In a minute or two he gave a kind of whistling snort, jumped over some brush and went on up the hill. He took his time about it too, and his tail wasn't up any longer so I guess he wasn't much scared."

"No, he wasn't really frightened," said the Storyteller. "He has gone up to one of his favorite feeding places and probably has forgotten all about you by this time, Jimmy. Did you see anyone else?"

“Only old Monkey-face. He was up on his watchtower when I came in,” replied Jimmy. “He makes me think of a cop on duty. Of what use is he anyway?”

The Storyteller laughed. “He *is* a sort of cop, I guess,” said he, “a feathered cop, one of Mother Nature’s G-men so to speak. As for his usefulness I know of no one among the feathered folk who renders more real service to man than does Monkey-face and the members of his family. He saved a lot of chickens for me this year, not to mention a ton or two of hay. If that isn’t being useful I don’t know what is.”

Instantly there was a chorus of demands for an explanation of how Monkey-face had saved chickens, and in what way he could possibly have saved hay. It was plain to the Storyteller that he was under suspicion. He was suspected of spoofing; of trying to fool his listeners. When at last he could make himself heard he declared that he wouldn’t tell them a word about Monkey-face that evening. “But,” he added, as he noted the disappointment in the faces around him, “next week when we meet you shall have all your questions answered, for we will have a visitor who knows more about owls, and Mother Nature and her children generally, than I do or ever will. You see he is a *real* naturalist. Now it is high time the story-log should be on the fire. Who brought it tonight?”

“I did,” cried Willis, stepping forward with a small log.

“Good for you, Willis,” exclaimed the Storyteller. “I didn’t think you would remember from way back last fall. To tell the truth I had forgotten myself whose turn it was to bring a log. Let me see it.”

Taking the log from the small boy, he pretended to examine it carefully. “Hm-m-m,” said he, “apple wood. Apple wood is good wood to burn. There won’t be many sparks but there will be a nice steady flame and that calls for a good story. I should say that this story-log is just right, Willis. Place it on the fire carefully. All of you watch for me to give you the signal and then together we will chant the invocation to the fire. I hope you remember it.”

This was Janet’s first story night. “What is a story-log?” she whispered to Rosemary.

“A log that burns while a story is being told. As soon as that log begins to burn the story will begin and it must end when that log burns out,” Rosemary whispered back.

Meanwhile Willis was carefully placing the small log on the fire. He stepped back. The Storyteller nodded and lifted one hand. The invocation

began.

“Fire, fire burn my log!
Snap and crackle! Leap and glow!
Turn to smoke and ashes but
Not too fast and not too slow!

In its heart a story lies;
Only you can set it free.
Fire, fire burn my log
While the tale is told to me!”

Without the Old House the soft dusk had settled over the landscape. Lightfoot was contentedly browsing on the ridge back of Esker Hill. The watchtower of Monkey-face was deserted. The big owl, a moving shadow among other shadows, was soundlessly policing the meadow in search of the mice that always are his first choice to satisfy his hunger.

Within the Old House the flickering firelight made wavering shadows that deepened to almost darkness in the far corners of the big room. It brought into strong relief the half circle of intent faces watching the blaze. Abruptly the silence was broken by the startlingly sharp snap of a breaking stick as it burned through. A small tongue of yellow flame leaped up, vanished, leaped again. With a soft sigh the eager faces were turned to the Storyteller. The story-log had begun to burn.

CHAPTER II

The Rarest Thing in the World

THE STORYTELLER began with a question. “If you were to start out to look for the rarest thing in the world what would you look for?”

No one answered. His eyes twinkled as, looking from face to face, he saw each pair of eyes in turn avoid his and gaze with embarrassed intentness into the fire. “You’re all Peter Rabbits,” he chuckled.

For a few seconds no one spoke. Jean broke the silence. “What do you mean by Peter Rabbits? How are we Peter Rabbits?” she wanted to know.

“Just this,” replied the Storyteller: “You don’t know the answer to my question. You don’t know what you would go looking for but you won’t admit you don’t know, and that is just how it was with Peter Rabbit when he started out to look for the rarest thing in all the Great World.”

“If he didn’t know what he was looking for how could he look for it?” This was from Nancy.

“Did he find it?” demanded Willis.

“Yes, he found it,” replied the Storyteller.

“What was it?” asked Billy Blake eagerly.

“What do you think it was?” the Storyteller wanted to know, whereupon the questions ceased and once more there was united interest in the fire.

“Well, I see I shall have to tell you the story,” said the Storyteller. “It was because of the Merry Little Breezes of Old Mother West Wind that Peter started out to search for the rarest thing in all the Great World.” He paused and in his eyes was a faraway look as if somehow he saw the Merry Little Breezes and Peter and the other things he told about. David called it the “seeing look.”

“Yes, sir,” continued the Storyteller, “it was all because of the Merry Little Breezes. But for them Peter never would have thought of starting out to look for something of which he knew nothing, not even what it was. You see the Merry Little Breezes had come dancing across the Green Meadows to the dear Old Briar-patch. There they had found Peter sitting under his favorite bramble-

bush twitching his wobbly little nose and chewing on nothing."

"I've seen him do that!" interrupted Billy, and promptly subsided under the glare of a battery of indignant eyes.

The Storyteller went on as if there had been no interruption. "The Merry Little Breezes danced around Peter, rumpled his hair, tickled his long ears and tried to pull his whiskers. Peter didn't mind. In fact he liked it. He is very fond of the Merry Little Breezes, and they are just as fond of him. Many times they have brought him news, good news, bad news, important news, news that has saved his life.

" 'Where have you been so early in the morning?' Peter asked.

" 'Over in the Green Forest. What do you think we saw there?' chanted the Merry Little Breezes.

"Peter shook his head. 'I haven't the least idea,' said he.

" 'We saw the rarest thing in all the Great World!' cried the Merry Little Breezes. Then they whirled and danced as only they can. They whirled and danced until all the leaves on the ground jumped up and whirled and danced with them.

"Right away Peter pricked up his long ears. 'What is the rarest thing in all the Great World?' he demanded.

" 'Don't you wish you knew?' teased one of the Merry Little Breezes.

" 'We won't tell you, for you wouldn't believe it if we did,' cried another.

" 'But we really did see it, Peter. We really did. Perhaps you will see it if you go over to the Green Forest,' a third added.

" 'How will I know it if I see it?' Peter wanted to know.

"But the Merry Little Breezes merely laughed, tickled his ears and tried to pull his whiskers. Then they danced away as merrily as they had come. You see they dearly love to tease Peter Rabbit.

"With a long hind foot Peter scratched a long ear. Then he scratched the other long ear with the other long hind foot. He worked his wobbly little nose back and forth very fast. Peter was thinking. That is he was thinking as much as Peter ever does think. 'Now what can the rarest thing in all the Great World be? muttered Peter to himself. But though he thought and thought and thought he didn't get the least idea what it might be. Then he tried not to think about it, and pretended to himself that he didn't care what it was.

"It was of no use. The more he tried not to think about it the more he did think about it. Curiosity wouldn't let him think of anything else. So at last

Peter started off. Lipperty-lipperty-lip he ran, straight for the Green Forest. As he passed Johnny Chuck's house Johnny called to him.

" 'Why all the hurry, Longears?' called Johnny Chuck.

" 'I'm going to look for something in the Green Forest,' replied Peter, stopping at Johnny Chuck's doorstep.

" 'You don't say! What is it?' replied Johnny Chuck.

" 'The rarest thing in all the Great World. The Merry Little Breezes told me about it. They saw it over there,' replied Peter.

"Johnny Chuck looked puzzled. 'What is this thing that is so rare?' he asked.

" 'I don't know. That's why I am going over to the Green Forest—to find out,' replied Peter, and kicking up his heels away he went, lipperty-lipperty-lipperty-lip.

"Over near the edge of the Green Forest he met Jimmy Skunk. 'My, my, my, what a hurry you are in!' exclaimed Jimmy. You know Jimmy never hurries.

" 'There is something in the Green Forest that I want to see,' replied Peter.

" 'Do tell!' exclaimed Jimmy, pretending to be very much surprised. 'You don't mean to say that there really is something you want to see. What is it this time?'

" 'It is the rarest thing in all the world,' replied Peter promptly.

"Jimmy looked interested. 'And just what is that?' he asked.

"I'll tell you when I have seen it. Come along and see it too,' replied Peter.

"Jimmy chuckled. 'You find it first,' said he. 'You're in a hurry and you know I never hurry. I hope you won't get tired hunting for it. If you find it drop around and tell me about it.'

"Peter said he would and once more he was off, lipperty-lipperty-lipperty-lip. Now the Green Forest is a big place and Peter had forgotten to ask the Merry Little Breezes in what part of it they had seen this thing so rare. So there was nothing he could do but to hunt all through it. He was getting a bit discouraged when he met Bobby Coon.

" 'Oh Bobby, have you seen it?' cried Peter, without stopping to say good morning.

"Bobby Coon stared at Peter a moment and then grinned. 'Probably,' he replied. 'There is little in the Green Forest that I haven't seen. If you will talk sense, Peter Rabbit, and tell me just what it is that you are looking for perhaps

I can help you.'

" 'It is the rarest thing in all the Great World and it is somewhere here in the Green Forest,' said Peter looking as he felt, a little foolish because his first question had been such a silly one.

" 'First tell me what this rarest thing is and then I'll tell you if I have seen it,' retorted Bobby Coon.

"Of course Peter couldn't do this so he said good-by and hurried on. 'He's crazy. He certainly is crazy. The idea of looking for something without knowing what it is!' said Bobby to himself as he watched Peter scamper out of sight.

"Whitefoot the Wood Mouse, Chatterer the Red Squirrel, Unc' Billy Possum, Sammy Jay, Trader the Wood Rat, all thought Peter quite as crazy as did Bobby Coon. Peter was discouraged and very tired but still running as he rounded a turn in the Lone Little Path and all but ran smack into Mrs. Grouse. Instantly she clucked sharply. Peter caught a glimpse of many scurrying little forms, but it was such a short glimpse that he actually wasn't sure about it. He rubbed his eyes. No one but Mrs. Grouse was to be seen. She looked startled, relieved and a wee bit indignant.

" 'So it is only you, Peter Rabbit!' exclaimed Mrs. Grouse, and added, 'For a minute you gave me a real start.'

" 'Yes,' replied Peter meekly, 'it is only me. Tell me, Mrs. Grouse, didn't I see a lot of your babies as I came around the turn?'

" 'Did you?' asked Mrs. Grouse, pretending to be surprised.

" 'I thought I did. In fact I'm sure I did,' replied Peter, looking about in every direction.

" 'You don't see them now, do you?' asked Mrs. Grouse with a satisfied chuckle.

" 'No,' replied Peter. 'No, I don't. But I'm sure I did only a moment ago.'

"Mrs. Grouse chuckled contentedly. 'You did, Peter, and they are right around here this minute,' said she.

"She clucked softly. Instantly a dozen babies, much like tiny barnyard chickens, appeared on all sides as if they had popped right out of the ground. They had been lying flat and motionless under leaves and sticks and pieces of bark and they were just the color of their surroundings.

" 'Aren't they darlings?' asked their mother proudly, and of course Peter agreed that they were.

“ ‘They are only three days old but already they obey instantly. Watch now,’ ” said Mrs. Grouse.

“She gave the same sharp warning cluck that Peter had heard when he almost ran into her. Hardly was it out of her mouth before those twelve baby grouse had disappeared. Not one waited so much as a second to find out what the trouble might be, or why their mother had warned them to hide.

“Peter said that never had he seen such wonderfully trained children and a lot more nice things that pleased their proud mother. You know Peter and Mrs. Grouse are old friends. Then Peter remembered what had brought him to the Green Forest and straightway asked Mrs. Grouse if she had seen the rarest thing in all the Great World, but as he couldn’t tell her what it was she couldn’t help him any.

“Just as the Black Shadows started to creep out from the Purple Hills where they had been hiding all day Peter crept into the dear Old Briar-patch. He was tired, very tired. He was even more disappointed. Just as he had settled himself comfortably under his favorite bramble-bush the Merry Little Breezes came dancing around him. They rumpled his hair, tickled his ears and tried to pull his whiskers.

“ ‘Did you see the rarest thing in all the Great World?’ they cried.

“ ‘No,’ replied Peter rather crossly.

“ ‘Yes you did! Yes you did!’ chanted the Merry Little Breezes. ‘You saw it over in the Green Forest when you met Mrs. Grouse.’

“Peter sat up abruptly. ‘No such thing!’ said he indignantly. ‘I saw Mrs. Grouse and her twelve babies, but that is all. I didn’t see another thing.’

“ ‘But you did! You did!’ shouted the Merry Little Breezes as they danced around him gleefully. ‘You saw perfect obedience and that is—’ ” The Storyteller paused.

“The rarest thing in all the Great World!” chorused the children. Just then the last of the story-log flared up in yellow flame that flickered for a moment and went out.

“Right,” said the Storyteller. “Never forget it. Now on with your things and home with you before the telephone begins ringing to find out where you are! One thing more!” he added as the children started to rise. “Come fifteen minutes earlier next story night.”

“Why?” asked Freddie.

“You will find out when you get here,” replied the Storyteller and would say no more.

CHAPTER III

The Old Naturalist

"I WONDER WHY the Storyteller wants us to be early tonight," said Brother as with Nancy and David he hurried down the road toward the Old House.

"And who it is that he said would be there tonight," added Nancy.

"He said that it would be someone who knows more about Old Mother Nature than he does, but I guess he was just fooling about that unless—" David paused at the thought that had popped into his head.

"Unless what?" prompted Brother impatiently.

"Unless he meant the Old Hunter," replied David. "I bet that is just who it is. I hope so. I like him. He tells true stories."

But it wasn't the Old Hunter who was talking with the Storyteller as the children joined the group at the foot of Esker Hill. He was a stranger whom none among them ever had seen before, although after the first few minutes he didn't seem a stranger at all. Indeed, it seemed as if they had known him always. He was well on in years, even older than the Old Hunter, but he didn't seem old. Perhaps it was because he was rather short, thin, wiry, quick in his movements. Perhaps it was because of his ready smile that lighted his whole face, and the twinkling keenness of his eyes that seemed, as Jimmy Andrews expressed it, "to see everything at once."

Anyway even though always afterward the children spoke of him as old they did not think of him as old. It was a term of affection rather than a reflection on his age.

"Now that you are all here," said the Storyteller, "I want you to meet a new friend of mine who is also an old friend. I met him in books long ago. This past summer I met him in person. Last fall when the Old Hunter paid us his first visit I told you that he knew more about birds and animals than anyone of my acquaintance. That is no longer true for here is one who knows even more about them, for all his life it has been his work and his pleasure to study Old Mother Nature and her children and about them, and to write about them and to teach others about them. He is what is called—what is such a person

called?”

“A naturalist,” said Robert.

“Right,” replied the Storyteller. “He is a naturalist.”

“A really truly naturalist who knows about everything and tells the truth about things?” asked David earnestly, then grew red in the face as everybody laughed, the guest most heartily of all.

“No, laddie, not one who knows all about everything, but one who knows a little about some things and is trying to learn more,” said he.

“And who does tell the truth about things,” added the Storyteller. “Now, Mr. Naturalist, that tall stub up yonder is the watchtower of a barn owl. Every night he sits there for a while. It is almost time for him now. I have told these boys and girls that he is sort of a feathered cop, that he has saved some chickens and some hay for me, but I suspect that they think I was spoofing them. I have had them come early tonight so that they may look for some evidence for or against old Monkey-face, as they call him, and I have invited you here to explain the evidence and to give us some inside information, the truth that David here always wants, about owls and hawks and how most of them serve man.”

From a pocket he took something which he held out on the palm of his hand. It was an oval ball of what looked like matted hair and was perhaps an inch and a half long and nearly an inch in diameter. “Here,” said he, “is a bit of evidence. Rally around, all of you, and take a good look at it. Then go up and look for some more evidence like it on the ground around that stub on which Monkey-face sits. Off with you now, and see who will be the best nature detective.”

A lively scramble up the hill followed. There was a shout of “I’ve found one!” from Freddie almost as soon as he reached the old stub. On hands and knees the children searched in the grass and among the leaves, excited squeals from the girls and shouts from the boys announcing the finding of those queer pellets. More than twenty had been found when at the call of the Storyteller the search ended and the children raced down the hill.

Little Mary was the last and just as she reached the bottom she stopped abruptly with a startled shriek that drew all eyes just in time to see a small form shoot up out of the grass at her feet and sail through the air in a beautiful arc straight toward the Old Naturalist, who chanced to be standing some eight or nine feet from Mary and facing her. He knew instantly what had happened and was ready for the frightened little creature that a second later struck

against him. He caught it. At once the children crowded around to see what he had and to ply him with eager questions.

"What is it?"

"Is it a bird?"

"Couldn't it see you?"

"What kind of a bird is it?"

The Storyteller came to the rescue, putting a stop to the jostling and crowding, quieting the noise. "How do you think you would feel if a lot of giants as tall as that big elm tree should come crowding and yelling around you?" he asked. "Just about the way that little prisoner our good friend has there does, I fancy," he added, answering his own question. Silence followed immediately.

The Old Naturalist smiled as he looked around at the flushed eager faces. "It isn't a bird, although I don't wonder that some of you took it to be when you saw it sailing through the air. You know the Indians used to say that among the animals there are seven sleepers. Well, this is one of them that I am holding here, the smallest sleeper of them all, and one of the first to retire. Indeed, it is about time now for him to retire for the winter. Does anyone know who it is?"

For a moment or so there was no reply. It was the Storyteller who broke the silence. Said he, "I think, Mr. Naturalist, that it must be Nimbleheels the Jumping Mouse whom you have there."

"A mouse!" exclaimed Jimmy. "I've seen lots and lots of mice but never one that could jump the way that one did."

"That," said the Old Naturalist, "is because you never before saw a jumping mouse. This little fellow is, for his size, one of the greatest jumpers in the world. If a deer could leap as far in proportion to its size it would clear more than one hundred feet at every bound. This pretty little chap can cover ten to twelve feet and you may be sure that he won't be so easily caught again. He was so startled that he jumped without first looking. When he finally did see me it was too late to avoid me. You know the old saying, 'Look before you leap.' This is an example of what may happen if you forget. The reason he can jump so is because he is built like a kangaroo. He has long hind legs and feet and little short front ones. Now come one at a time and have a good look at him so that the next time you see one you will recognize it."

Frances was first. "Oh, the pretty little thing!" she exclaimed. "I didn't know a mouse could be so pretty. I thought all mice wore dark gray coats, but

this one has a fawn colored one, almost yellow."

"And see his white waistcoat," said the Old Naturalist.

"My goodness, look at the length of that tail!" exclaimed Rosemary, who was next.

"That is his balancing pole," said the Old Naturalist.

Rosemary looked at him suspiciously. "How can a tail be a pole?" she wanted to know.

The Old Naturalist chuckled. "That is just a manner of speaking, my dear," said he. "Perhaps you have seen a tightrope walker holding a long pole across in front of him. It is to help him keep his balance. This long slender tail does the same thing for this little mouse. It helps him keep his balance in the air during one of those long jumps. If he should lose his tail, or part of it, he might be able to jump just as far but he would never know how he was going to land. He would just turn over and over in the air and might land on his back or facing the direction he had just come from."

When all the children had inspected his little captive the Old Naturalist told them to stand back. "What are you going to do?" asked David.

"Let him go," was the reply. Thereupon there was a chorus of protests and two or three expressed the wish that they might have him for a pet.

"All right. If you can catch him you may have him," replied the Old Naturalist with a twinkle in his eyes, and stooping he quickly released little Nimbleheels. Instantly he was in the air in one of those marvelous jumps. He had covered more than ten feet when he landed. Another equally long jump followed, then three or four shorter ones, after which they saw him no more.

"Good-by, little Nimbleheels. Sleep tight all winter," cried Jean softly.

"And take care that old Monkey-face doesn't see you," added the Storyteller. "That reminds me. In all this excitement we have almost forgotten about that evidence you found. We'll take it down to the Old House now and find out if it is for or against Monkey-face."

When they arrived at the Old House they found a table covered with brown paper and placed under a strong light. Pockets were emptied of the evidence and it was spread out on the table. In eager curiosity the children gathered around as the Old Naturalist took out his pocketknife and a pair of slender forceps. He picked up one of the pellets.

"What are those things anyway?" Brother wanted to know.

"When you eat cherries what do you do with the seeds, or stones, as some

folks call them?" asked the Old Naturalist.

"Spit them out," was the prompt response.

"Of course," said the Old Naturalist. "You spit them out because your stomach cannot digest them. These pellets are the owl's cherry-stones so to speak. Bones and hair and feathers are not digestible, so they are not allowed to go beyond the bird's crop. When the owl swallows a mouse it goes first into the crop. There, in a way difficult to understand, all the hair and bones are removed and rolled into pellets such as these. The owl then spits these out just as you would spit out cherry stones. Perhaps you noticed that these pellets feel something like felt. That is because they are of fine hair matted or pressed together and that is what felt is. Of course this means that Monkey-face has been living on small animals. If he had been eating birds there would be feathers mixed in, and so far I haven't seen a feather.

"Now the question is, what kind or kinds of animals has the owl been catching? We'll open one of these pellets."

With knife blade and forceps he carefully pulled one of the pellets apart. "Ha!" said he, "I thought as much." In his forceps he held up a piece of bone. "That," he explained, as he laid it to one side, "is part of the skull of a mouse. I can even tell you what kind of a mouse. It was one of those short-tailed, stout-bodied little fellows you sometimes get a glimpse of running in the grass, a meadow mouse or field mouse. It goes by both names."

He opened another pellet. "More meadow mouse bones," said he.

A dozen pellets yielded the same results. Then he found a skull that was different and put this aside. A moment later he exclaimed in triumph and held up a jaw bone. "Rat!" said he.

"I wonder if that was a brother of the rats that got so many of my chickens in the spring before Monkey-face appeared on the scene," said the Storyteller, and at once the children remembered that he had said that his chickens had been saved by Monkey-face.

When the last pellet had been examined bones of two rats and of four species of mice had been identified, with several times as many meadow mice as of the others taken together. Not a single feather or bone of a bird was found.

"That doesn't mean that a barn owl never catches a bird," explained the Old Naturalist. "He does now and then, but it is seldom unless he happens to take up his abode in a city where it is difficult to catch rodents, and where starlings happen to be numerous—and a nuisance. Do you know what meadow

mice eat?”

“Seeds,” Billy promptly replied.

“Some seeds,” agreed the Old Naturalist, “and some insects, but chiefly grasses. It has been estimated by those who know about such matters that in a single year one hundred meadow mice on an acre of meadow will eat one ton of green grass. This would make half a ton of cured hay. That number of mice to an acre is not at all unusual. Often it is very much greater and you can understand why when I tell you that a single pair of these little rodents have been known to have seventeen families in one year. It would be possible for one pair of these mice to have one million descendants at the end of a year if nothing happened to any of them during the twelve months. So you see if Mother Nature didn’t provide some checks these little rodents would increase to such numbers that they would eat all the food on which man depends.”

“I get it!” cried Jimmy. “The mice and rats do so much damage that they are really outlaws and old Mother Nature just appointed a lot of cops, such as owls and hawks and foxes and some others, to keep the outlaws down. Now I see how old Monkey-face saved the hay for you.” Jimmy looked over at the Storyteller and grinned.

The Storyteller nodded and the Old Naturalist smiled. “That is it, my boy,” said he. “Most owls and hawks do a very great deal of good for man and very little harm. You saw how that long tail of that jumping mouse enabled him to keep his balance. I told you how an accident to that tail would upset his balance. When not interfered with Mother Nature maintains a balance in life. When men and boys through ignorance and stupid prejudice kill the feathered and furred policemen she has provided to keep the outlaws under control they upset that balance. Well, now that you have seen the evidence for or against old Monkey-face, what is your verdict?”

“I think,” replied Frances, “that he must be one of our very best friends.”

“You are quite right, my dear. The barn owl is one of the most useful of all birds to man. Mr. Storyteller, you are fortunate to have Monkey-face for a neighbor. I congratulate all of you on your verdict,” said the Old Naturalist, and his warm smile brought answering smiles as he looked around the circle.

By this time the hour was too late for a story. “I don’t care,” said David. “It was better than most stories because it was all true.”

CHAPTER IV

The Whistler

"POPCORN BALLS, oh boy!" exclaimed Willis as the Storyteller brought in a huge pan of white and golden balls and asked Frances to pass them around. When she came to Freddie he took two.

"Pig!" she whispered indignantly.

The Storyteller overheard it and laughed. "Freddie isn't a pig, Frances," said he. "He has simply been smart enough to count noses and make an estimate that there are two apiece all around and he's getting his share. Freddie is right, so each take two and that will save passing them a second time. Billy, did you forget to bring the story-log?"

"No *sir*, I wouldn't forget that!" Billy pulled a stick from behind the wood box and held it out. "Smell it," said he. "It smells good. It's cedar."

"So it is—red cedar!" exclaimed the Storyteller in pretended surprise.

"I like to smell it but moths don't. My mother has a chest made of it and keeps clothes in it 'cause the moths won't go near that ol' chest," continued Billy.

The Storyteller nodded. "That makes it rather useful, doesn't it? Do you know of any other special use for it?" he asked.

"Oh, I guess it's used for lots of things," replied Billy.

"You use it every day in school," said the Storyteller.

"I know!" cried Nancy. "It's used for making lead pencils!"

"Right you are, Nancy," replied the Storyteller. "Now it seems to me that a log of such useful wood, even such a small one as this, and not the best of wood to burn, should have a good story in it. Suppose, Billy, you put it on the fire and we'll soon find out."

The chairs were drawn up around the hearth, Billy placed the log on the fire and the invocation was chanted. "It's your log, Billy. Is there anyone in particular you would like to hear about?" the Storyteller asked.

"Yes sir. If you please I would like to hear how Whistler got such a good

whistle," replied Billy.

"Who is Whistler?" Rosemary wanted to know.

"He's Johnny Chuck's cousin and he lives in the mountains out West. I've read about him. He's a marmot," volunteered Willis.

"That is right," said the Storyteller. "Whistler is a marmot, the hoary marmot. Sometimes he is called the gray marmot."

"I've heard him and boy, can he whistle! It can be heard for more than a mile. I heard him when we were out in Glacier National Park last summer," said Billy.

"Johnny Chuck can whistle too. I've heard him," said Jimmy.

"Sure. I've heard him too. But if you think he can whistle you just ought to hear that cousin of his. He's *some* whistler, I'm telling you," retorted Billy.

"The story-log is burning!" cried Janet.

"So it is!" exclaimed the Storyteller. "And that means it is high time to begin the story. You all know that Old Man Coyote really belongs way out in the West, but was trapped and was made a prisoner in a park zoo from which he finally escaped to make his home in the Old Pasture, and hunt on the Green Meadows and in the Green Forest. That is how Peter Rabbit came to know him.

"Early one morning Peter, sitting safe in a bramble-tangle, watched Old Man Coyote stalking Johnny Chuck. Johnny was just a little way from his own doorstep getting his breakfast of sweet clover. Old Man Coyote wanted breakfast too, and was trying to get it. He wanted Johnny Chuck. Would he catch him? Peter hoped not. Peter sat up the better to watch. It was very exciting.

"Johnny was not careless. He kept popping up and dropping down. When he dropped down it was to get a few bites of clover. While he ate this he sat up and looked all around for danger. No, Johnny wasn't careless. But despite his watchfulness he hadn't discovered Old Man Coyote, and Peter was getting worried. If Old Man Coyote should get much nearer to him Johnny with his short legs would have hard work to reach his home before Old Man Coyote with his long legs could catch him.

"When Johnny Chuck sat up Old Man Coyote always lay as flat as possible, so flat that he was hidden in the grass. The instant Johnny dropped down for clover Old Man Coyote would creep forward swiftly, never taking his eyes from Johnny Chuck and dropping flat the instant Johnny started to sit up.

“Peter grew more and more anxious. He couldn’t bear to think of anything so dreadful happening to his friend. He tried to warn Johnny by thumping the ground with his hind feet, but it was useless; the distance was too great. How Peter did wish he had a good voice, a strong, loud voice.

“Finally Old Man Coyote seemed to be so near Johnny Chuck that Peter shut his eyes. He couldn’t look any longer. He didn’t want to see Johnny Chuck killed. Then he heard a distant whistle. He knew it. It was Johnny Chuck’s danger signal. Peter’s eyes flew open just in time to see Johnny’s black heels disappear through his doorway leaving Old Man Coyote standing on the doorstep, a picture of disappointment. Peter hugged himself for joy.

“A little later Old Man Coyote started to pass the bramble-tangle and stopped to grin in at Peter. Peter wasn’t afraid. Among those brambles he was quite safe. He knew it and he knew that Old Man Coyote knew it.

“ ‘You didn’t catch Johnny Chuck and I’m glad of it,’ said Peter, twitching his wobbly little nose in the most provoking manner.

“ ‘Not this time,’ agreed Old Man Coyote, grinning more broadly than before. ‘He was too quick for me.’

“ ‘You seem to be good-natured about it,’ ventured Peter, and indeed Old Man Coyote didn’t appear in the least put out because of his failure.

“ ‘Why shouldn’t I be? The chuck I fail to catch today may be mine tomorrow,’ replied Old Man Coyote.

“ ‘I heard Johnny whistle way over here,’ said Peter.

“ ‘Pooh! That’s nothing. You should hear his cousin, Whistler. There’s a fellow who can really whistle,’ replied Old Man Coyote.

“Peter pricked up his ears. ‘Am I to understand that Johnny has a cousin named Whistler?’ he asked. There was such a funny look of surprise on his face that Old Man Coyote chuckled.

“ ‘You certainly are, Brother Rabbit,’ he replied. ‘And a big handsome fellow he is. He lives out in the mountains of the Far West where I came from, and what a whistle he has! What a whistle!’

“Now Peter always had considered Johnny Chuck’s whistle a very good whistle. He had envied Johnny that whistle. ‘Pooh!’ said he. ‘I don’t believe he can whistle any better than Johnny Chuck. Now tell me honestly, can he?’

“It was Old Man Coyote’s turn for a question. ‘Have you ever heard Farmer Brown’s boy whistle on his fingers to call in that old nuisance, Bowser the Hound, when he was a long way off?’ ”

“I can whistle on my fingers,” interrupted Freddie, and did so, then looked abashed and stared into the fire.

The Storyteller looked hard and meaningly at Freddie, then resumed. “ ‘You don’t mean to tell me that Johnny’s cousin can whistle as loud as that!’ Peter exclaimed, his eyes big with wonder and a hint of unbelief.

“ ‘I do. I mean to tell you just that,’ retorted Old Man Coyote.

“Mingled wonder and curiosity prompted Peter to say, ‘If anyone but you, Mr. Coyote, had told me this I wouldn’t believe it. I wonder how he ever happened to get such a whistle.’

“ ‘He needed it so Old Mother Nature gave it to him. If you want me to I’ll tell you about it,’ replied Old Man Coyote as he stretched out comfortably beside the bramble-tangle.

“ ‘Please do,’ begged Peter.

“ ‘It happened a long time ago,’ began Old Man Coyote.”

“When the world was young,” interposed Jean, and in her turn stared into the fire. After a moment’s pause the Storyteller continued. “ ‘It seems to me that everything wonderful happened a long time ago,’ said Peter.

“Old Man Coyote chuckled. ‘You’re wrong, Peter,’ said he. ‘It is *wonderful* that such an addle-pated fellow as you has lived to hear this story. As I said before it happened a long time ago. When the first of all the gray or hoary marmots started out to find a place in the Great World they were high-minded, more so than any of their relatives. They chose to live high up among the rocks of the mountains. They were wise, were Mr. and Mrs. Marmot, for they had been quick to discover that their coats and the rocks were much of a color. So among the rocks they were safer from enemies. Then, too, there were fewer enemies living up there. Also, there were wonderful places down under the rocks in which to make a home, places from which it would be almost impossible for anyone, unless possibly Mr. Grizzly Bear, to dig them out.

“ ‘There they lived and there their children were born and grew up and scattered to make homes for themselves among the rocks. In turn they had children who did the same thing, so that by the time Mr. and Mrs. Marmot were great-great-grandparents there were many marmot homes widely scattered over the rocky slopes.

“ ‘Hard times came for the meat eaters and Puma the Panther wandered up to the timber line and discovered the marmots. For a time he no longer went hungry. Now the marmots had no voices worth mentioning, just enough to talk among themselves when visiting. They never had felt the need of anything

more.

“ ‘Then one day as old Mr. Marmot sat on a rock watching for danger he saw one of his grandchildren also sitting on a rock far across a little valley. He saw, too, what the other did not see, Puma creeping up behind. He saw, but alas, he was helpless to warn that grandchild. Then it was that a great wish took possession of him, the wish for a far-reaching voice that he might give warning. He did the best he could, but it was useless. He tried and tried but all he could do was squeak, and it wasn’t much of a squeak at that.

“ ‘By chance Old Mother Nature came along just then. She saw at once that old Mr. Marmot was in great distress. She noticed that he kept his eyes fixed on a certain rock across the valley. Then she saw Puma creeping nearer and nearer that unsuspecting young marmot and she understood that great wish of Mr. Marmot’s. She reached over and tapped him on the back just as he tried his very hardest to squeak louder. Instead of a squeak there was a sharp, clear, piercing whistle that could be heard a long, long distance. At the sound of it the young marmot across the valley instantly ducked out of sight among the rocks. Puma the Panther leaped, but he was too late. He lashed his long tail from side to side. He was very, very angry.

“ ‘As for old Mr. Marmot, he was not only surprised but he was almost frightened by his own whistle and by the touch of Old Mother Nature. You see he hadn’t known that she was about. She smiled down at him. It was a pleasant smile that put him at his ease.

“ ‘ “That whistle is all your own, Mr. Marmot, and I shall give one just like it to every member of your family. You little people up here among the rocks need a warning signal and you shall have it as long as you make good use of it.” So said Old Mother Nature, and as suddenly as she had appeared she disappeared.

“ ‘So that is how Brother Marmot of the Far West got his whistle and a name at the same time. You see after that he always was called Whistler. Both the name and the whistle have remained in the family ever since and believe me, Brother Rabbit, that whistle is some whistle.’

“ ‘It must be,’ replied Peter, and added a bit wistfully, ‘I wish I could whistle.’

“Now all the popcorn balls are gone, all the story-log is gone, and it is time for boys and girls to be gone. Who brings the story-log next time?” concluded the Storyteller.

“I do,” said Frances.

“Good,” said the Storyteller. “And this time you must be sure to bring something with it, my dear.”

Frances looked puzzled. “What?” she asked wonderingly.

“A story,” replied the Storyteller, his eyes twinkling. “You will bring the story-log and you will tell the story.”

In dismay Frances protested. “I can’t do that. I don’t know any story. I just won’t come!”

“Not come!” exclaimed the Storyteller, his eyebrows lifting in mock consternation. “Don’t you know that without a story-log there can be no story night? You *have* to bring the story-log and this particular log must have a story with it or it won’t burn. You can’t let us down like that, you know. We won’t allow it. Will we?” he appealed to the others.

“No!” they shouted.

“That settles it,” declared the Storyteller.

> “Now coats and hats and away you go!
> For ’tis time for home and bed you know.”

CHAPTER V

Frances Tells a Story

"POOH! THAT'S a mighty small story-log if you ask me," said Brother as Frances joined the circle in the firelight, a small log in her hands.

"Nobody asked you, Mr. Smarty," retorted Frances. "A big log would require a long story and my story isn't very long."

"Quite right, my dear. The log should suit the story, or put it the other way around if you like that better. Who is the story to be about?" said the Storyteller.

"Blacky the Crow," replied Frances.

"Huh! That ol' black bird? Who wants to hear about him?" exclaimed Willis.

"I do," said the Storyteller quietly, and the small boy looked abashed.

"Blacky is smart," contributed Jimmy. "I guess he is about the smartest of all the people of the Green Forest or on the Green Meadows."

"Just so," agreed the Storyteller. "Not even Reddy Fox is smarter. His neighbors know it, and while they may not like him they do respect him. He is absolutely independent, and independent people always are respected."

"A crow can talk if its tongue is split. My grandpa says so," Billy volunteered.

"Crows can learn to talk, but splitting the tongue is cruel and unnecessary," said the Storyteller. "Crows make great pets. They top all the birds in intelligence, and they are full of mischief. When I was a boy living in the country my chum had a pet crow. Monday was wash day. Blacky knew it. He would hide and if he wasn't found and shut up trouble was bound to follow. He would remain hidden until the clothes had been hung out on the line, then, when no one was around he would slip out and pull off every clothespin with the result that a good part of the wash would drop on the ground. The rascal gave every appearance of enjoying his little joke.

"That same crow could tell time," continued the Storyteller, his eyes

having that misty look they always had when he was looking into the past, the "seeing backward look" Rosemary called it. "At least he could tell two hours of the day. He could tell twelve o'clock noon and four o'clock in the afternoon. His master went half a mile to school. Every noon at twelve o'clock Blacky was at the schoolhouse waiting to ride home on his master's shoulder. It was the same at four o'clock when school closed for the day. And he never made the mistake of going on Saturday or Sunday."

"Is that a true story?" David asked.

"Every word true," replied the Storyteller gravely.

"I know a true story about a pet crow," said Billy. "This crow's name was Jim and he was jealous of the cat. Sometimes when the cat had caught a mouse and would lie down to play with it Jim would steal up and pull the cat's tail. Of course the cat would jump and quicker'n lightning Jim would grab the mouse."

"That makes me think of a story about a crow named Hiram, and it's true too," said Jimmy Andrews. "There was a black cat named Nig and the two were great friends. One day two boys and a dog came along and the boys sicked the dog on the cat and the cat was so scared it got confused and ran around the yard and the dog cornered and bit it. About then Hiram came to the rescue. He came down out of his special tree like lightning, screeching loud as he could. He flew at both the dog and the boys and made 'em run for their lives. Nig managed to climb up in Hiram's tree and when the crow came back from chasing the dog and boys he flew up and perched on Nig's back and rubbed his bill over the cat's head and talked to him sort of like he was crooning. And that's no fairy tale."

"I'm sure it isn't," agreed the Storyteller. "But it seems to me that it is high time for the story-log story and Frances has both the log and the story ready. All right, Frances."

The log was placed on the fire, the invocation chanted and then as the log burst into flame Frances began.

"Peter Rabbit was sitting on the bank of the Smiling Pool when Blacky the Crow flew over him on his way to Farmer Brown's cornfield. Peter knew what Blacky was going there for. He was going there to pull up a lot of corn that was just sprouting, for there is nothing he likes better than corn that has just sprouted.

" 'Blacky better keep away from that corn if he doesn't want to get in trouble,' said Peter."

"Why didn't Farmer Brown put out a scarecrow?" Willis wanted to know.

“You know what Grandfather Frog says,” Frances went on just as if there had been no interruption. “ ‘Chuga-rum,’ says Grandfather Frog. ‘Chuga-rum,’ says he. ‘Don’t you worry about that black rascal. He won’t get in any trouble. If there is any danger in that cornfield he’ll find it out in plenty of time. If there isn’t any danger he’ll find that out too. He’s smart, that fellow is.’

“ ‘I know,’ said Peter. ‘He seems to go where he pleases, when he pleases and do what he pleases without getting into trouble. I don’t see how he does it. I really don’t. He is so black that in daylight he can’t keep out of sight if he tries. As for boldness, that ought to be his middle name. Honestly I don’t see how he gets away with all he does. I really don’t.’

“Grandfather Frog chuckled. ‘Peter,’ said he, ‘if in that funny head of yours you had half the wits that Blacky has in that black head of his you would be the smartest rabbit who ever wobbled a nose. Blacky comes honestly by those wits of his. His father was smart and his mother was smart and their parents were smart and all the crows before them, way back to the days when the world was young, were smart.

“ ‘It was then that the first pair of crows started out in the Great World. They wore black coats and looked just about as crows look today. At first those black coats bothered them a great deal. They couldn’t move without being seen. The only time they couldn’t be seen was after dark and then they were afraid to be out just as Blacky is today.

“ ‘They talked it over a lot, those two, and the more they did that the more the feeling grew that Old Mother Nature had made it about as hard for them as she could. The only good thing that they could see about those black coats was that at night not even the keen eyes of Hooty the Owl could see them, and this was one thing to be thankful for. So at night they were thankful, but as soon as daylight came they forgot this. Then they had to get a living and while doing it there was no such thing as keeping out of sight. It couldn’t be done. And while they had good wings, strong wings, they were not swift wings like those of some of their neighbors.’

“ ‘ “It gets down to this,” said Mr. Crow at last. “We’ve got wits, just as good wits as anybody else. We must make the best of them. We’ll use them for our own protection. No more guessing about things, my dear. No more guessing. We must *know* about things, never guess.”

“ ‘So those two crows began to study. Yes, sir, they began to study. Nothing much is found out in this world without studying, Peter. Just remember that. Those crows studied their neighbors. They found out how each one lived. They found out what each could do. Yes, and they found out what

each couldn't do. You know sometimes it is just as important to know what other folks can't do as to know what they can do.'

" 'I know,' said Peter.

" 'Those crows,' continued Grandfather Frog, 'found out who were to be feared and who were harmless. They found out who were the most successful in finding food and from whom they could get a share with the least trouble and danger. And all the things they learned they remembered.

" 'It didn't take them long to learn that man was an enemy and, just as he is today, the most dangerous of all enemies. So they studied man just as they had studied their other neighbors, and they learned a lot more about him than he ever did about them. From a safe distance they watched him and all he did. One of the things they found out was that where man was there was plenty of food for those smart enough to get it.

" 'So Mr. and Mrs. Crow spent most of their time near man's home. They found that he couldn't run fast and he couldn't fly, but somehow he could and did kill or hurt others at a distance. So they watched to see how he did it and they learned just how near they could go to man with safety. This was something none of their neighbors knew.

" 'They found out that when man had nothing in his hands they could safely go as near him as they pleased. Then after a while they could tell the difference between the things in his hands that meant danger and the things that were harmless.' "

"Crows today know guns when they see them," interrupted Jimmy, then hastily added, "I'm sorry."

"Don't do it again," warned the Storyteller. "Go on, Frances. Jimmy forgot."

" 'Those old crows were smart enough to find out that when man was near they had nothing to fear from others and they just made the most of it. They got into a lot of mischief but never made the mistake of not first making sure of a way of escape. The result was that man became their most relentless enemy. Yet so well had they learned his ways that they feared him less than some others. When he couldn't shoot them he tried to trap them, but they just chuckled. They were too clever to be caught that way.

" 'The worst mischief they got into was pulling up newly sprouted corn. They loved it. No sooner was man's back turned after chasing them out of the cornfield than they were right back there. The result was the appearance of the first scarecrow. It looked like man and at first it fooled Mr. and Mrs. Crow.

They kept a safe distance from it. For two days they sat and watched it from far enough away to know that they were safe. They watched that scarecrow and grew hungrier and hungrier for that sprouting corn.

" 'On the morning of the third day old Mr. Crow suddenly chuckled. "We'll have a good breakfast this morning," said he. "Do you know what I think?"

" ' "What do you think?" asked Mrs. Crow. "Tell me what you think."

" ' "I think that thing is harmless. It hasn't moved since we first saw it. I think it is intended to fool us. Watch me, my dear."

" ' "What are you going to do?" cried Mrs. Crow anxiously.

" ' "Watch me," repeated Mr. Crow and flew straight toward that scarecrow. Mrs. Crow screamed with fright. She was sure he had lost his senses.

" 'Mr. Crow kept right on. He flew over to that scarecrow and alighted on one of the arms. "Caw! caw! caw!" he called at the top of his voice. Mrs. Crow was so surprised that she nearly fell out of the tree in which she was sitting. For a minute or two she was speechless. Then her quick wits understood that Mr. Crow had somehow found out that that was not a real man and at once she flew over to join him.

" 'Such a racket as those two crows made. Then they dropped down on the ground and began to pull up corn all around that scarecrow. They were getting that good breakfast that Mr. Crow had promised.

" 'So, you see, almost from the beginning Mr. and Mrs. Crow used their wits. The more they used them the cleverer those crows became. Their children were taught to use their wits and they in turn taught their children. So the crows became the smartest of all the feathered people in all the Green Forest and on all the Green Meadows and it has been so ever since. That is how it happens that today Blacky and his friends manage to pick up a good living and still avoid danger despite the fact that they have no way of keeping out of sight, and to fool man oftener than he can fool them. There is nothing like quick wits, and knowing how to use them, Peter Rabbit. Those who have them live longer and live better. Here comes Longlegs the Heron. Good-by!'

"Grandfather Frog took a beautiful header into the Smiling Pool, and that's the end of the story."

"Splendid, Frances! Splendid!" cried the Storyteller while everybody clapped. "And you are the girl who couldn't tell a story. There's a good moral in that tale."

“I don’t like morals,” announced Willis.

The Storyteller chuckled. “Most of us don’t,” said he, “but just the same they are good for us. Who sees the moral in that story?”

“I guess it is to learn all you can about other folks and then do ’em,” said Jimmy, and everybody laughed.

“You’ve got the general idea but not quite the right application, Jimmy,” said the Storyteller. “It is to make the most of every opportunity to gain knowledge and then make the best possible use of it. Rosemary, you bring the story-log next week. You might tell me right now of whom you would like to hear. You see I want plenty of time so that I can be sure to have as good a story as we had tonight.” His eyes twinkled at Frances.

“Do you know how the pelican happens to have that funny big bag under that funny big bill of his?” asked Rosemary.

“Bring a good story-log next time and we’ll try to find out, my dear,” replied the Storyteller.

CHAPTER VI

Grandpa Pelican's Fish Bag

"THIS LOG IS a very special one," announced Rosemary as with Frances and Jean she entered the Old House.

"It came from the seashore," Jean broke in.

"Which means that you don't know what kind of wood it is," said the Storyteller.

"Oh, yes, we do; it's driftwood," cried Frances.

"It is part of a wreck and I guess it had been in the water a long, long time before it was washed up on the beach. It makes a pretty fire when it burns, green and blue flames mixed in with the yellow and red ones. I thought that if we are to have a story about a bird of the sea it would be nice to have a story-log from the sea," explained Rosemary.

"A happy thought, my dear! A very happy thought!" replied the Storyteller. "Driftwood from the sea, especially that from old wrecks in which copper nails and copper sheathing were used, and which have lain in the salt water a long time, burn with beautifully colored flames. I am afraid that everybody will be so interested in watching this log burn that no one will listen to the story."

"No, you're not. You know perfectly well that every one of us will be listening with both ears. We always do when you tell a story," declared Frances.

"Flatterer," said the Storyteller, reaching over to tweak an ear.

All the others were there when the three girls arrived, so each filling a dish with popcorn they at once found their places before the fire.

"Rosemary has asked for a story about Grandpa Pelican and his fish bag. I wonder how many of you ever have seen a pelican," said the Storyteller.

"I have. I saw some pelicans when I was down in Florida last winter and I have wondered about them ever since," said Rosemary.

"I've seen a stuffed one. He sure was a funny-looking bird," said Jimmy.

Freddie had seen one in a zoological park, and all the others had seen

pictures of the big birds with the great bills. Even little Mary knew what they looked like.

“The Pelican is the only bird with such a big carryall,” remarked the Storyteller.

“What’s a carryall?” Billy wanted to know.

“I know!” cried Robert. “It is a big bag, big enough to carry a lot of things, all you want to carry.”

“What does a pelican have so much of to carry that it needs a carryall?” Jean asked.

“Fish,” replied Rosemary promptly. “That carryall really is a fish bag because only fish are carried in it. What I want to know is why a pelican has such a big handy bag when no other bird I know of has anything like it.”

“And that is just what the story tonight is to be about,” declared the Storyteller. “Put the log on the fire, Rosemary, and we’ll find out about Grandpa Pelican and his fish bag.”

“Is there more than one kind of pelican?” inquired David.

“There are brown pelicans and white pelicans, David,” replied the Storyteller.

“And do both kinds have fish bags?”

“They most certainly do, and make good use of them.” The Storyteller smiled at his earnest questioner, then exclaimed, “Look!” The story-log had begun to burn.

Exclamations of delight and wonder followed, for colored flames had begun to flash and leap. The Storyteller waited a couple of minutes for the children to enjoy what Nancy said was “the prettiest story-log we’ve ever had,” then began the story.

“Each spring Johnny Chuck takes a lively interest in the return of his feathered friends from the Sunny South. He never has been able to understand why anyone can want to make such a long journey to escape cold weather when it is so much simpler to go to sleep for the winter. There are times when he is perhaps a little bit envious of the birds, but it has nothing to do with cold weather or discomforts of any kind. No, sir, it is nothing of this sort that makes him envious. It is something that Peter Rabbit has a lot of and that is—”

“Curiosity!” cried Billy.

“Now how did you guess that?” asked the Storyteller. Without waiting for a reply he continued. “Yes, sir, Johnny Chuck sometimes wishes that he had

wings just to satisfy his curiosity. You see once in a while he realizes how small a part of the Great World he has seen, and what wonderful things there must be that his feathered neighbors have seen but that he never has and never will. It is then that he becomes envious.

"It happened that one morning very early in the spring, shortly after Johnny had awakened from his long sleep, he was out on the Green Meadows over near the Smiling Pool hunting for some new grass or clover, for as yet little had started to grow. A sound caught his attention. Abruptly he sat up to listen, all else forgotten. Had he been mistaken? No, there it was again, 'Quack, quack, quack.' There was no mistaking that voice. Mrs. Quack the Mallard Duck had arrived and was over in the Smiling Pool. There could be no mistake, for no one else had a voice like that. Johnny headed for the Smiling Pool.

"As he approached the bank he moved somewhat cautiously until he was where he could peep over. On the Big Rock sat Jerry Muskrat, and swimming back and forth around the Big Rock was Mrs. Quack sure enough. Johnny sat up, but Mrs. Quack and Jerry were so busy gossiping that neither noticed him. He waited a minute or two then whistled sharply. Of course that drew their attention.

" 'My goodness, it is a good thing that it is only little me here and not a hunter with a terrible gun,' said he.

"At this Mrs. Quack began to swim about nervously. 'Are you quite sure that there isn't a hunter with a terrible gun about?' she asked, and it was plain that she was uneasy.

" 'Quite sure,' replied Johnny, 'I can see all over the Green Meadows and if there was a hunter about I would not be here. You may be sure of that. Besides, this isn't the hunting season. You ought to know that, Mrs. Quack.'

"Mrs. Quack nodded. 'I do,' said she, 'but they used to hunt us in the spring and I can't get over the feeling that some may do it now. I'm glad to see you, Johnny.'

" 'What were you and Jerry Muskrat talking about?' inquired Johnny bluntly.

" 'Mrs. Quack was telling me about Grandpa Pelican who lives way down where she spends her winters. She was just going to tell me how he happens to have his funny fish bag,' replied Jerry.

"At once Johnny Chuck was all ears, as the saying is. 'Fish bag! fish bag! What is a fish bag?' he exclaimed.

“ ‘Why a bag in which to carry fish of course, stupid,’ replied Jerry Muskrat.

“ ‘Of course. Certainly. Of course. Who is Grandpa Pelican? Does he wear fur or feathers? Tell me that,’ said Johnny.

“Mrs. Quack looked positively shocked. ‘Such ignorance!’ she exclaimed. ‘Such dreadful ignorance! This is what comes of never traveling. Grandpa Pelican is a bird, a big bird, and he lives altogether on fish.’

“ ‘Oh! So that’s it.’ Johnny’s eyes twinkled. ‘Now I’m not so ignorant as I was. To keep from being ignorant the next best thing to travel is the use of tongue and ears. Where does Grandpa Pelican carry his fish bag, inside or outside? Tell me that, Mrs. Quack.’

“Jerry Muskrat chuckled and Mrs. Quack looked at Johnny sharply to see if he was in earnest or trying to be funny. Johnny caught the look and hastened to add, ‘I didn’t know but what that was your way of saying that he has a great big stomach.’

“Mrs. Quack knew then that Johnny’s question had been asked in good faith. He really was seeking information. ‘I have no doubt that he has a big stomach,’ said she. ‘Judging by the number of fish he eats he must have, but his fish bag is not his stomach. It is fastened right under the lower half of his tremendous bill and his throat. It is the handiest thing I have ever seen. There are times when I wish I had such a handy bag myself.’

“ ‘Tell us,’ begged Johnny, his eyes sparkling with eagerness, ‘how Grandpa Pelican happens to be so favored. How did he come by that fish bag? You were going to tell Jerry, so now please tell both of us.’

“Mrs. Quack had it on the tip of her tongue to refuse. You see she was still a bit nervous as the result of being so startled by Johnny Chuck’s sharp whistle. Then she thought better of it. ‘Are you quite sure that no danger is near? Will you keep a sharp watch?’ she asked.

“Johnny sat up very straight. He looked this way. He looked that way. He looked every way. There was nothing in sight to be afraid of and he told Mrs. Quack so. He promised to keep faithful watch while Mrs. Quack told the story. So after a few minutes of fussing with her feathers to make sure that each one was properly dressed and exactly in place, and that she was looking her very best, she began.

“ ‘Grandpa Pelican comes of an old family, an old, old family of fisher folk. The love of fish and fishing runs in the family. The very first pelican that ever was became a fisherman early in life. It was this way. Old Mother Nature

started him off with a long bill, one of the biggest of all bills. On the end of it she made a little hook. She gave him a long neck, webbed feet, short legs and big wings. When she was through and turned him loose in the Great World to find a place where he would fit in he was about the homeliest fellow who wore feathers. Being in a hurry she neglected to tell him where he should live or what he should eat. She just dropped him on the water and hurried off about some other business.

" 'Mr. Pelican found out what those webbed feet were for and swam around for a while. Then he flapped his wings and managed to get up in the air. He flapped them until he got going, then sailed along on them without moving them at all. When he felt himself beginning to go down he flapped some more and then sailed again. Pelicans have been flying just that way ever since. Grandpa Pelican way down there where I spend my winters flies just so today.

" 'By and by Mr. Pelican came to land where a lot of feathered folk were gathered. As soon as he alighted they gathered around him and stared at him and asked him all sorts of personal questions. They wanted to know what he ate and where he lived and what he could do. Mr. Pelican was embarrassed and confused. He didn't know the answers. You see he was so new to the Great World that he didn't even know that he had to eat, although he was aware of a most unpleasant all-gone feeling down inside. Of course that was his stomach trying to tell him that it was empty and needed food.

" 'His neighbors, after laughing at him and poking fun at him, left him alone. He watched them. When he saw some of them picking up seeds and swallowing them, and others picking up worms and bugs and swallowing them, he tried to do the same thing. He couldn't because of that little hook on the end of his bill; it was in the way.

" 'Later as he sat on a rock feeling very lonesome and helpless and more and more all-gone inside he saw Mr. Loon, who had been swimming about below him, disappear like a flash under water. A minute later he appeared with a fish in his bill. As Mr. Pelican watched Mr. Loon swallow that fish it came over him that the one thing in all the Great World that he most wanted right then was a fish. He didn't know why he wanted it. He just wanted it.

" 'He spread his wings and flew out over the water. He looked down. He saw some small fish near the surface just below him. Without stopping to think he plunged into the water. He was very clumsy about it, for it was his first dive, but he caught one of those fish. Thus it was that Mr. Pelican discovered that he could dive as well as swim and fly, and that fish was the food for him.

“ ‘In course of time Old Mother Nature sent him a mate and he and Mrs. Pelican flew and swam and fished together and were perfectly happy. With the coming of spring they built a nest. It wasn’t much but they were very proud of the nest. They were still more proud of the three eggs it soon contained, but this pride was nothing to the pride that was theirs when from those eggs hatched three of the homeliest babies anywhere in all the Great World. Of course to the eyes of Mr. and Mrs. Pelican they were not homely; they were beautiful.

“ ‘But homely or beautiful those babies were hungry. Then it was that Mr. and Mrs. Pelican discovered that they had made a sad mistake. They had built that nest too far from the fishing grounds, much too far. Back and forth until it seemed as if they couldn’t lift their wings again they flew and the best that either could do was to bring one fish at a time. The babies were not getting enough to eat and they were getting nothing themselves.

“ ‘At last Mrs. Pelican had to give up. She couldn’t make another trip for fish. Mr. Pelican wasn’t much better off, but he couldn’t see those babies starve. So once more he started off. He was flying along in a wobbly fashion, being so tired and weak, you know, when who should spy him but Old Mother Nature. For a minute or two she watched him from the rock on which she was sitting, then called to him. Mr. Pelican dropped down on the water in front of her and for the life of him he couldn’t help sighing. You see it seemed to him that he never would be able to get going again.

“ ‘Old Mother Nature asked a few questions and soon she knew all about those hungry babies so far from the fishing grounds. “Mm-m-m,” said she thoughtfully. “This will never do. This will never do at all.”

“ ‘Suddenly she reached out and grasped Mr. Pelican by his long bill and ran her hand the whole length. When she let go there was a big bag from the tip of his lower bill clear back beneath his throat. “Now, Mr. Fisherman,” said she, “see how many fish you can take back home next time.”

“ ‘Mr. Pelican didn’t really understand what had happened until he reached the fishing grounds and opened his mouth. All the other fishing birds laughed at him, but not for long, not after they saw him start for home with that bag full of fish. Old Mother Nature didn’t forget to provide Mrs. Pelican with a similar bag and from then on the babies had all the fish they could eat and more. Since then there never has been a pelican without a fish bag. So, of course, this is how Grandpa Pelican came by the one he has,’ concluded Mrs. Quack.

“Johnny Chuck thanked Mrs. Quack, then scampered home. And now it is time for you boys and girls to do the same thing,” concluded the Storyteller.

CHAPTER VII

The Question-Log

"I WISH," said little Mary, "that the Old Naturalist would come again. I like him."

"I wish he would come too," said David. "I want to ask him some questions."

"It would be fun to have a question-log instead of a story-log some night and everybody ask questions," suggested Frances. "Of course," she added, "we would have to have the Old Naturalist here to answer them."

"That is a splendid idea, Frances. I wonder we never have thought of it before," exclaimed the Storyteller. "What do you say to trying it tonight? Jimmy, I believe you brought the log this time and now that I look at it closely I think you made a mistake. I think you brought a question-log instead of a story-log."

Jimmy grinned. "I hope I did," said he. "I have a question or two I would like to have answered."

"But the Old Naturalist—" Frances began.

"Is right here," finished the Storyteller for her as a knock sounded on the door.

Sure enough it was the Old Naturalist. He was given an enthusiastic greeting and escorted to the seat of honor in the chimney corner. His eyes twinkled. "I have come," said he, "because I have heard there is magic here in the Old House when a story-log burns, and I want to be a boy again and listen to a story."

The Storyteller gravely shook his head. "Too bad," said he. "Yes, sir, it is too bad. You see Jimmy here made a mistake and brought a question-log instead of a story-log. But the magic is here. It must be, for it brought you just when we wanted and needed you most to tell us the things we want to know. Now then, Jimmy, where's that question-log?"

Jimmy passed him the log. He carefully placed it on the fire. Then

stretching his hands out over it the Storyteller solemnly chanted:

"Fire, fire burn this log!
In its heart are answers true
To the questions we would ask;
Set them free we conjure you."

A moment later the log burst into flame. "It is your log so you have the right to the first question, Jimmy," said the Storyteller.

Jimmy had a question ready. "What bird can fly fastest and what animal can run fastest?" he asked.

"According to a chart in a magazine published by a leading Natural History Museum the duck hawk has been timed at the rate of one hundred and eighty miles an hour while hunting. If any bird can fly faster it is the Asiatic swift for which a speed of two hundred miles an hour is claimed. Among animals the gazelle of the Gobi desert and our own pronghorn antelope have been timed by automobile for half mile dashes at a mile a minute, but, strange as it may seem, the champion sprinter belongs to the cat family. It is the cheetah or hunting leopard of Asia and Africa and is said to do a hundred yards at the rate of seventy miles an hour," replied the Old Naturalist.

"Snakes can run like lightning, some kinds anyway," volunteered Billy.

The Old Naturalist chuckled. "Rather slow lightning, laddie," said he. "A snake is streamlined. It is so slim and glides so smoothly that it seems to move much faster than it really does. In fact the best that the fastest of American snakes can do is said to be less than four miles an hour, and this for only a short distance. So you can run much faster than a snake. One scientist has given the speed record to a fly."

"Just a common fly?" David wanted to know.

The Old Naturalist smiled at the small boy leaning forward, his elbows on his knees, his hands cupped around his chin, his eyes big with interest, and shook his head. "No," said he. "It is a fly called the deer fly, and this scientist estimated that the male could travel at the rate of eight hundred and eighteen miles an hour, which is faster than sound travels through the air. But another great scientist asserts that this is all a mistake for the fly would have to eat more than its own weight in food every second to develop sufficient power for such speed, and that probably the fly cannot do much over twenty-five miles an hour. If the fly could make the speed claimed for it by the first scientist it would circle the earth between dawn and dark providing it could travel that far

without stopping."

"Gosh!" exclaimed Willis. "It would be some speeder. I'd hate to be a cop trying to stop him."

When the laugh that followed had subsided the Storyteller turned to Frances. "You thought of this delightful idea so it is your turn for a question, my dear," said he.

"Why is it that all the wonderful things are way off somewhere, never around home where we can see them?" she asked.

Little laugh wrinkles gathered at the corners of the Old Naturalist's eyes. "Child," said he, "you have a pair of lovely eyes, as bright eyes as I have seen in a long time. How is it that they have never been able to discover wonderful things all around you all the time? Mr. Storyteller, may I have an egg?"

The egg was brought. From his pocket he took a little silken bundle which the children at once recognized as a cocoon, also a tiny seed. He held the three out on the palm of one hand and with the other dropped a handkerchief over them. The children leaned forward eagerly, expectant but not knowing what might happen.

"Now," said he, "if I should wave the wand of mystery above this while chanting a magic verse to awaken the fairies of life, and then should snatch off the handkerchief and there before you should appear a hen, a beautiful moth and a tomato plant full of fruit you would say it was wonderful. But because I possess no magic you are disappointed when I lift the handkerchief for all you see is an egg, a cocoon and a seed. Yet there really is a fairy of life asleep in each of these, and in due time Mother Nature will awaken them. A hen *will* come from this egg. A handsome moth *will* come from this cocoon. A tomato plant *will* come from this tiny seed. What more wonderful can be found anywhere in all the Great World? It really is just as marvelous as if I could do the awakening with a magic wand.

"Here is a feather from the wing of a pigeon. I picked it up on the way over here. And you say there is nothing wonderful around home! For what could you ask more wonderful than this? Tell me now."

"It doesn't look wonderful to me," Frances confessed.

"Nor me," said Rosemary.

"It's just a feather. I've seen lots like it," added Brother.

"You mean you have looked at lots of them, but you haven't seen them at all," said the Old Naturalist. From a pocket he brought forth a magnifying glass and had the children one by one look through this at the feather.

“You see,” he continued, “it looks as if made up of two rows of featherlets on opposite sides of the quill. Look sharp and you will see that each of these featherlets, which are called barbs, has two rows of what are called barbules, and these barbules have tiny curved hooks called barbicels. This feather is about six inches long and that means it has about twelve hundred barbs or featherlets, according to a famous scientist, and as each of these has about two hundred and seventy-five pairs of barbules there are almost if not quite a million barbules on this one feather, not to mention the tiny hooks or barbicels.”

Frances picked the feather up and looked at it with something like awe. “Why, it’s marvelous, simply marvelous!” she exclaimed.

“Yes, my dear. Many things about us are truly marvelous but seem ordinary and commonplace because they are so familiar to us that we look at them but never see them,” replied the Old Naturalist. “David, is that a question I see hanging on the tip of your tongue?”

“The other day when I was playing in the brook I saw an eel and it looked so much like a snake that I’ve wondered if it is a true fish. Is it?” replied the small boy.

“It certainly is,” was the prompt response. “It is just as much a fish as is a perch or a pickerel or a trout, and has had a lot more interesting life than they have had. Did you ever see a whale, David?”

David admitted that he never had seen a whale, but would like to. “I dare say that eel you saw has seen a whale,” said the Old Naturalist.

“Aw say, Mr. Naturalist, have a heart. Don’t ask us to believe too much,” protested Jimmy. “Whales live way out in the ocean, so how could that eel ever have seen a whale?”

“But that eel was born way out in the ocean, a long, long way out in the ocean, where the water is very, very deep. The next time you have a chance you look at a map and find Bermuda. Then look south of that and find the Bahama Islands. Somewhere between those islands and Bermuda that eel was born,” explained the Old Naturalist.

“Then how did it get way up here in fresh water and miles and miles from the seashore?” Freddie wanted to know.

“It swam,” replied the Old Naturalist. “It swam every inch of the way, and it did it when it wasn’t much more than a baby. It swam maybe a thousand miles in the ocean, so you see in all probability it had plenty of chance to see a whale. It wasn’t more than three inches long when it reached the mouth of a

big river. When it got used to the fresh water it started up the big river until it came to another river, a branch. It swam up this and finally it turned up Laughing Brook out yonder and that is how it got up to where David saw it. So you see it is a much traveled and, I think, a very remarkable fish."

"How do you know all this?" demanded Willis bluntly. "How do you know it was born way out there in the ocean? Why couldn't it have been born somewhere in the Laughing Brook?"

"Because," was the quiet reply, "it is now known that no common eels, or silver eels as they are called, are ever born anywhere but on those breeding grounds way out in the ocean. No matter in what inland waters you find one of these eels it came from that one place out there in the ocean. And what is more, it will go back there when the time comes."

"Do you mean back where it was born? What for?" Rosemary wanted to know.

"To deposit her eggs and then die," was the response. "Probably that was a female that David saw. After a number of years she will work her way down the brook and so on down to the mouth of the big river that enters the sea. There she will find a mate waiting for her. Together they will start off on that long journey in the ocean never to return. Another strange thing is that the eels of Europe are born in the same general locality. It takes them about a year longer to reach European rivers than it does our eels to reach American waters because the former have so much farther to travel, and one of the amazing facts in this amazing story of the eels is that neither kind ever makes a mistake. European eels never are found in American waters, and American eels never go to Europe. Fishes are very wonderful creatures. At least some are."

"I wouldn't want to be a poor fish, living down in the water and never coming out and seeing what it is like on land," said Jean.

"Some do," said the Old Naturalist.

"But fishes can't live out of water," protested Jean.

"Some can. There are even some that can't live in water unless they can come to the surface for fresh air; otherwise they drown," was the astonishing reply. "In Africa, Australia and South America are lungfishes, so called because they breathe air. When the pools in which they live dry up they burrow down in the mud but leave little air holes. The mud dries and hardens and there they sleep in something the way that Johnny Chuck sleeps in winter, only this queer sleep produced by heat and drouth instead of by cold is called estivation instead of hibernation. They live that way for months, even years,

until heavy rains soften the mud and waken them.

“In India, Siam and other countries of that part of the world, is a little fish called Anabas that must have air to breathe, and that travels considerable distances over land, leaving one body of water to go to another, climbing steep banks when necessary. It is known as a walking fish and one has been known to travel more than three hundred feet in about thirty minutes.

“Then there are other little fishes known as mudskippers who delight in leaving the water to skip about on the mud and even hunt their food there. The late Martin Johnson, famous explorer, photographed one of these enterprising little chaps climbing the root of a mango tree. They love to lie out of water, all but their tails. A funny thing has been discovered about these tails. The tail fin is used for breathing in the water and is even more efficient than the gills.”

“And now,” spoke up the Storyteller, “we must have some skipping right here, for it is high time you boys and girls should skip for home.”

Loud protests followed, but the Storyteller was firm and smilingly the Old Naturalist pointed to the fire. “You see,” said he, “there no longer is a question-log.”

“When it comes my turn to bring a log it’s going to be a question-log,” announced David as he bade the Storyteller and the Old Naturalist good night.

CHAPTER VIII

Thunderer Saves a Friend

"WELL, NANCY, what sort of a log did you bring tonight?" asked the Storyteller.

"A story-log," replied the little girl. "I just love stories about the little people of the Green Forest and the Green Meadows. So, please, I would like a story about one of them."

"All right," said the Storyteller, "a story you shall have. Shall it be about one of the meadow folk or someone who lives in the Green Forest?"

"Someone who lives in the Green Forest if you please," replied Nancy.

Janet was started around with a big pan of doughnuts and the Storyteller called the roll, after which he took his accustomed place by the fire and the story-log was duly consigned to the flames.

"Nancy wants a story about one of the Green Forest folk but hasn't said which one, so I am going to tell you a story of two. One will be Thunderer the Grouse and the other will be—" the Storyteller paused and smiled at the eager faces turned toward him. "I tell you what; I'll describe him and *you* tell *me* his name," he finished.

"Does the first one to guess it get anything?" Willis wanted to know.

"Another doughnut," replied the Storyteller promptly. "Now listen closely.

“His ears and hind legs if you scan
You find are on a common plan.
He’s long on hearing, long on speed
And long on dodging when there’s need.
But if he’s asked to prove his might
He’s short on courage for a fight,
Declaring ’tis the better way
To run, and fight another day.
When summer dons her gayest gown
He wears a coat of sober brown,
But this into the discard throws
For white when come the winter snows.
His toes are long and widely splay,
And just because they are that way,
That he like others need not plod,
With snowshoes Nature hath him shod.”

“Jumper the Hare!”

“Snowshoe Rabbit!”

“Varying Hare!”

The Storyteller put his hands over his ears. “Everybody have a doughnut!” he cried.

Everybody was quite willing, and by the time it had made the complete round the doughnut pan was empty. “All of you were right,” he declared. “Jumper often is called snowshoe rabbit. If he were called snowshoe hare it would be more correct, for he is a true hare, not a rabbit at all. Who knows why he is called snowshoe rabbit?”

“He has such big spreading feet that he can walk on soft snow that even Peter Rabbit, who is ever so much smaller, would flounder in,” offered Jimmy.

“That’s it,” agreed the Storyteller. “The name varying hare, which really is his correct name, comes from his habit of changing from a brown coat in summer to a white coat in winter. While his coat is changing it is a mixture of brown and white, sort of patchwork. Now for the story.

“Jumper the Hare and Thunderer the Ruffed Grouse have been neighbors and friends ever since they were young, just starting out in the Great World. Each knows and understands the other and his ways thoroughly. Just now they were together under a low-growing bough of a hemlock tree. They were in a trying situation. My, my, my, I should say so! It was very trying indeed. You

see they were peeping out watching a man coming nearer and nearer, and in his hands was a terrible gun.

"Now had it been Reddy Fox or Old Man Coyote coming Thunderer would have felt sure that he could depend on his stout wings to take him to safety, and Jumper would have been certain that his long legs could and would take him out of danger. A man with a gun was a very different matter. Shot from that terrible gun could travel much faster than Thunderer could fly or Jumper could run. Thus there would be little chance of getting away without at least one of them being hurt. Both knew it.

"They sat perfectly still, which was the very best thing they could do. The hunter didn't know they were there. If he didn't look under that branch he would go right past without ever knowing that they were anywhere near. So in freezing, which means keeping motionless, they were doing the wisest and best thing.

"But it was hard work. Yes, sir, it was the very hardest kind of hard work. You see they were afraid, terribly afraid, and with every step that hunter took toward them that fear increased. So sitting still became harder and harder. Thunderer set himself to spring into the air on thundering wings should they be discovered, and held his breath. Jumper the Hare set his long hind feet under him ready for a sudden leap, laid his long ears back and held his breath.

"Nearer came the hunter, and nearer. His terrible gun was held in readiness for instant use. He looked this way. He looked that way. He was looking for Thunderer, and Thunderer knew it. It seemed to him that the thumping of his heart must be heard by that hunter. Thunderer's bright eyes grew dark with fear. It seemed to him that he must, simply *must* fly. He couldn't understand how that great man could look so happy, for he did look happy, when he was filling others with such awful fear.

"Frightened as Thunderer was, in his heart was a little bit of gladness. He was glad that that hunter wasn't Farmer Brown's boy. Ever since the winter before, when for a short but terrible time Thunderer and Mrs. Grouse had been held prisoners in the snow under the icy crust that in the night had formed above them as they slept, he had had a kindly feeling toward Farmer Brown's boy who had found them, rescued them, and fed them. Ever since then Thunderer had thought of Farmer Brown's boy as a friend, and it was good not to have this faith destroyed.

"The hunter was so close that he actually brushed the tip of the branch under which Thunderer and Jumper were hiding. Would he look beneath? Would he? If he did would he be able to kill both of them? Why didn't he go

on? He didn't. Instead he stood still right in front of their hiding-place, his back toward them. He rested the butt of his terrible gun on the ground.

" 'I certainly should be able to find that grouse around here somewhere. I saw him often enough before the opening of the hunting season,' said the hunter, talking to himself. What happened after that was just as Jumper told it to his cousin, Peter Rabbit, when they met a day or two later.

" 'It was this way,' explained Jumper. There we sat under that thick hemlock branch, holding our breath, with that hunter so near that I could have reached out and touched him.'

" 'My, that must have been exciting!' interrupted Peter.

"Jumper paid no attention to this but continued. 'It was all right until he spoke aloud, talking to himself I guess. Anyway the sound of that voice was so unexpected that it startled me a little and I moved. It was only a little, but that little was enough. In fact it was too much. You see I rustled some dry leaves and the hunter heard them. He turned and began to pull aside that branch. Perhaps you can guess how I felt then.'

"Peter nodded, his eyes wide with excitement. 'What did you do then?' he demanded.

" 'I was quite sure that even yet he didn't see us,' said Jumper, 'so I kept perfectly still. But suddenly he saw me. I knew it by the look that crossed his face and the way in which he lifted his terrible gun. So I jumped. I jumped my very best and ran. How I ran! Looking back I saw him point that terrible gun straight at me and my heart seemed to flop right over. I didn't have a bit of hope left, not a bit. Just as I expected to hear the bang of that terrible gun there was a great whirr. You know who made that noise.'

"Again Peter nodded. 'It was Thunderer,' said he.

" 'Yes, sir, it was old Thunderer himself, good old Thunderer,' replied Jumper. 'He flew up almost in that hunter's very face. I guess the noise of Thunderer's wings made that hunter jump. Anyway, he didn't shoot at me, but whirled and pointed his gun at Thunderer. The latter had by this time dodged behind a tree. You know how wonderfully clever both he and Mrs. Grouse are at doing that. The gun banged twice, making a dreadful noise, but I knew by the way Thunderer went sailing over a treetop that he wasn't hurt.

" 'By this time I was safe, for I was where he couldn't have found me if he had tried. Wasn't it a splendid thing that Thunderer did for me? I surely would have been shot if he hadn't done just what he did just the way he did.'

" 'It wasn't a splendid thing at all,' declared Thunderer, who, unnoticed,

had approached while Jumper was talking. ‘I did what I did because I had to do something, and there wasn’t anything else to do. So there wasn’t anything splendid about it, nothing splendid at all.’

“ ‘But you saved Cousin Jumper’s life, didn’t you?’ asked Peter.

“ ‘I suppose that in a way I did,’ admitted Thunderer the Grouse.

“ ‘Then that is all there is to it. It *was* a perfectly splendid thing you did,’ retorted Peter.

“ ‘So I think and so I have told him over and over again, but it isn’t of any use,’ said Jumper, then added, ‘Perhaps some day I may do as much for him.’

“And very likely Jumper may. The folks of the Green Meadows and the Green Forest are ever doing things for each other, often without realizing it, but just as effectively as if they had planned it. You see none of us can live without affecting for good or ill those with whom we come in contact. By the way, do any of you know the differences between hares and rabbits?”

“Hares are much bigger than rabbits.”

“Hares have longer ears and longer legs.”

“Hares never go in holes in the ground.”

“Rabbits live in briar-patches and old pastures and where they can visit gardens, but hares live in the Green Forest where there is plenty of undergrowth, the thicker the better.”

“All true,” said the Storyteller. “And here is another interesting difference. Baby rabbits are born wholly helpless. They are nearly naked and blind. The eyes of a baby hare are open at birth. It has a nice little fur coat and it is not so helpless as is its small cousin.

“There goes the last of the story-log. Freddie, you bring the log next time and be sure it is a good one. Now home to bed, and pleasant dreams to all of you.”

CHAPTER IX

Peter and Paddy

FREDDIE HAD brought the story-log. He had placed it with care and already it had begun to smoke. “What kind of a story does that log call for, Freddie?” the Storyteller asked.

“A beaver story,” came the prompt response. There was no doubt that Freddie knew what he wanted. “I guess that Paddy the Beaver is just about the smartest animal that is.”

The Storyteller smiled. “I fear our friend, the Old Naturalist, would think that a pretty broad statement, Freddie,” said he. “It doesn’t do to make statements too broad, you know. Wouldn’t it be better to say that Paddy is *one* of the smartest animals? You see there are others who are smart in different ways, quite as smart in their ways perhaps as Paddy is in his, though I must admit that I know of none that does more wonderful things.”

“Can’t Peter Rabbit be in the story too?” asked little Mary. “I love Peter,” she added.

“Of course Peter can be in the story,” replied the Storyteller. “In fact he has to be in the story I have in mind for it was Peter who learned something rather important from Paddy the Beaver. By the time that story-log burns out perhaps you all will have learned something also.

“You know what a happy-go-lucky little fellow Peter is. It is his nature to be happy-go-lucky. He takes things as they come. He doesn’t think about what has happened in the past. He doesn’t worry about what may happen in the future. It is with the present that he is chiefly concerned.

“This was just such a night as Peter loves. It was fall. The air was just cool enough to make running and jumping a joy. The silvery light of Mistress Moon sifted down through the trees and made strange shadows. Peter hopped over one that lay across the Lone Little path, then scampered on through the moonlight. Brown leaves rustled under his feet. A hickory nut, shaken loose by a wandering Little Night Breeze, struck the ground close beside him and caused him to make an extra long hop because it startled him so.

“Peter was bound nowhere in particular, which is just where he usually is bound. Suddenly he cut a hop short right in the middle and sat up. His head was cocked a bit to one side and his long ears stood straight up. He had heard a distant crash and knew it for what it was, the crash of a falling tree. For a few minutes he sat still listening. Far in the distance he heard the hunting call of Hooty the Owl. This meant that for the present he had nothing to fear from that hunter of the night. But what had caused that crash? Peter scratched—”

“A long ear with a long hind foot,” chanted the chorus.

“Then he scratched—”

“The other long ear with the other long hind foot,” finished the chorus.

“And after that,” continued the Storyteller, “Peter scratched his nose. All this scratching meant that Peter was thinking. He was thinking hard. Somehow he always thinks better when he scratches, or so it appears. ‘That was queer,’ muttered Peter. ‘A tree fell. Nothing else could have made such a crash. But why did it fall? It couldn’t have been blown over, for there isn’t wind enough to rustle the leaves. If it had been chopped down I would have heard the sound of chopping. I wonder—’

“Peter didn’t finish. He jumped straight up in the air and when his feet touched the ground again away he went, lipperty-lipperty-lipperty-lip. ‘It was Paddy the Beaver!’ he said to himself. ‘As sure as big jumps are faster than little hops it was Paddy the Beaver who made that tree crash. I hope he’ll cut another so that I may see him do it.’

“Peter scampered along deeper and deeper into the Green Forest. By and by he saw ahead of him an opening among the trees. When he reached it there lay a beautiful little pond. It was the pond of Paddy the Beaver. Peter could remember when there had been no pond at all there, only the Laughing Brook.

“To this he gave no thought, but hurried around the pond to the upper end where grew some aspen trees well back from the water. Peter knew Paddy well enough to be sure that he would waste no time cutting other trees when he could get aspens. Scampering along in his usual heedless fashion Peter all but tumbled head first into a ditch. He managed to save himself on the very edge.

“ ‘That’s funny!’ Peter exclaimed aloud.

“ ‘What is funny?’ demanded a voice that seemed to come from right out of the water in that ditch in front of Peter. Then a brown head moved out into the moonlight.

“ ‘Hello, Paddy!’ cried Peter. ‘It is funny that I don’t remember this ditch. The wonder is that I didn’t tumble into it and get soaking wet.’

“ ‘There’s nothing funny about it,’ retorted Paddy the Beaver. ‘You don’t remember seeing it because you never have seen it until now. It wasn’t here the last time you paid us a visit. And, Peter, I’ll thank you not to call it a ditch. It’s a canal. That’s what it is—a canal.’

“Peter blinked. ‘If it wasn’t here the last time I visited you how does it happen to be here now? Where did it come from?’ he wanted to know.

“ ‘You mean where does it go to?’ replied Paddy with a twinkle in his eyes. ‘It comes from our pond and it goes over to those aspen trees, and it didn’t happen at all; Mrs. Paddy and I dug it. Things worth while seldom happen, Peter Rabbit. They are the result of good planning and hard work.’

“With his eyes Peter followed the silver line of the canal for many feet toward the aspen trees. He saw how neatly the earth thrown out in digging had been piled along one bank. ‘Phew!’ exclaimed Peter. ‘What an awful amount of work! Just thinking of it makes me tired. What good does it do? I believe in getting out of life all the pleasure possible. There is no sense in working more than one has to. What is this canal for anyway?’

“ ‘To save work,’ replied Paddy, his eyes still twinkling.

“Peter suspected a joke. He looked hard at Paddy, but Paddy’s face was too sober to even hint at such a thing. ‘Humph!’ said Peter. ‘Humph! Why don’t you talk sense? The idea of working to save work. Ha, ha, that’s a good one! I always have thought that you had a lot of good plain common sense, Paddy, but you must have lost it since I last saw you. The idea of doing a lot of hard work like this and then saying that you did it to save work! That is the most foolish talk I ever did hear. It certainly is.’

“Just then there was a faint splash somewhere up the canal near the aspen trees. Peter saw something in the water moving toward them. Presently Mrs. Paddy swam past them. She was towing an aspen log. As she passed she nodded to Peter and kept on through the canal and out into the pond taking the log with her. She had moved along quite fast and smoothly.

“ ‘How long do you think it would have taken her to haul that log over land down to the pond?’ Paddy asked, then answered the question himself. ‘It would have taken her several times as long as it did by water and every inch of the way she would have had to work hard. She would have had to tug and push that log over the uneven ground. Not only that, but all the time she would have been in danger of being surprised and attacked by Buster Bear or Old Man Coyote, or Puma the Mountain Lion or Yowler the Bobcat. Being in the water she had nothing to fear. Perhaps you noticed that swimming with that log was

really no work at all. But I can't stay here gossiping; I've got too much to do.' With this Paddy started to swim up the canal. Peter followed along the bank.

"At the end of the canal Paddy first made sure that there was no danger. Then he climbed out and waddled over to a freshly cut tree. Peter knew that this must be the one he had heard crash. Paddy went to work trimming off branches. Soon Mrs. Paddy joined him. They worked steadily, wasting no time. When the branches had been removed they began cutting the trunk into short logs. As soon as a log had been cut it was hauled to the canal and rolled into the water. Then one towed it through the canal to the pond and out to the food-pile they were making near their house, for the bark of those logs was to supply them food all winter. Meanwhile the other kept right on cutting another log.

"Peter simply sat and watched. He is good at that, sitting and watching, you know. Paddy wouldn't talk. He had no time for idle gossip and talking interfered with work. Just watching those two work made Peter tired. Yes, sir, it gave him a tired feeling all over. He watched Paddy cut another tree by biting out chips all around it with his great teeth. Just as it was ready to fall Paddy slapped the ground hard with his broad flat tail. It was a warning to get out of the way. It so startled Peter that he ran. Paddy and Mrs. Paddy dived into the canal. There they remained for some time after the crash of the tree. They knew that there were keen ears in the Green Forest whose owners would know just what that crash meant.

"Sure enough, a few minutes after the crash a big black form appeared quite suddenly in the moonlight right in front of Peter, who was squatting under a little hemlock tree. Peter held his breath for this was Buster Bear. He had made no sound. It was as if he had arisen right out of the ground. Buster sat up and looked over the ground where the beavers had been at work. He grinned good-naturedly. In a few minutes he shuffled off. He hadn't really expected to surprise them at work. He had merely wanted to satisfy himself that that crash had been caused by them. There were plenty of sweet little beechnuts on which to dine. When there were no more of these it would be time enough to think of a beaver dinner.

"As soon as the sound of Buster's shuffling footsteps had died away Paddy and Mrs. Paddy hurried back to work to make up for lost time. Peter watched a little longer, then stole away. He went over to Paddy's pond and around the dam at the lower end. There he squatted under a little pile of brush where he was well hidden but where he could look out all over that little pond.

"The night wore away. Just as the Jolly Little Sunbeams began chasing the

Black Shadows away Paddy and Mrs. Paddy came swimming down the pond. They climbed out on the end of the dam close to where Peter was hiding. Their night's work was done and they had come here to sit awhile before going to their house out in the water for a well-earned sleep.

"Presently Lightfoot the Deer came out of the woods on the far side of the pond. With his forefeet in the water he drank his fill. Then, his beautiful antlered head held high, he stood for a few minutes enjoying the peace and beauty of that quiet place.

"Hardly had Lightfoot disappeared when Buster Bear came for his morning drink. For some time he splashed about in the shallow water, then with a satisfied grunt shuffled away. Billy Mink swam out from behind Paddy's house, dived, and a moment later popped up with a fish in his mouth. He took this ashore and ate it.

"Paddy sighed lightly. It was a sigh of satisfaction. 'They all enjoy our pond,' said he. 'Mrs. Quack the Mallard Duck raised a big family here last summer and said it was the best nesting place she had ever had. Honker the Goose with his flock will spend a day or two here on their way to the Sunny South. They ought to be along in a few days now. And all these folks and many more have us to thank. We built this dam that makes the pond they all enjoy so. Building it was a lot of hard work and it takes work to keep it in repair, but it has been and is work worth while. Of course we made this pond for ourselves that we might live in comfort and safety, but it goes to show that no one can do honest constructive work for himself without benefiting all his neighbors. That makes the work doubly worth while. Queer, isn't it, that that long-legged bunch of lazy curiosity can't seem to get it into that funny little head of his?'

"Peter sat up abruptly. 'He—he must mean me!' he exclaimed under his breath. Indignantly he prepared to hop out and tell Paddy just what he thought of him. Just then, however, Paddy began to speak again and Peter squatted down to listen.

" 'I'm sorry for him. I'm truly sorry for him,' said Paddy. 'He hasn't found out that there is more pleasure in a thing you have worked for than in anything else. A lot of people never have found that out and I'm sorry for all of them. We've got to work hard to get that food-pile big enough to last us all winter, but when the job is finished we won't have a thing to worry about. We'll have plenty to eat, a home where we will be safe, and all winter to rest in. When snow and ice come poor Peter will have to hustle every day to keep from starving. That's the way with happy-go-lucky people who never look ahead, or

are too lazy to work. Why, work is *fun* if only you make it so. And nobody can do honest work without making the Great World a better place in which to live, better for everybody. Well, my dear, let's go over to the house and go to bed. I'm tired enough to really enjoy a good sleep.'

"Paddy and Mrs. Paddy slipped into the water and Peter saw them no more. For a long time he sat thinking. There was a new idea in that funny little head of his. 'I believe,' said he slowly, 'that Paddy really does enjoy working, though I don't understand how he can. It is true that the work he and Mrs. Paddy have done has added a whole lot to the Green Forest. It has done a lot for other people. They are glad that Paddy and Mrs. Paddy are here. I wonder if anyone is glad that I am here.'

"Peter sighed wistfully. Then he thought of little Mrs. Peter waiting for him at home in the dear Old Briar-patch and his face brightened. 'There is one, anyway, who is glad that I'm alive, but if I don't get home soon she will think I'm not,' said he, and away he went—"

"Lipperty-lipperty-lipperty-lip!" chanted the listeners.

"And that," concluded the Storyteller, "is all I am going to tell you tonight about Paddy the Beaver, lumberman, builder and engineer in the Green Forest."

CHAPTER X

Tribute to the King

"I SAW A FISH HAWK today. I saw him catch a fish in the river," announced Jimmy.

"Was it big?" asked Willis.

"Which, the hawk or the fish?" Robert wanted to know.

"The fish, Mr. Smarty," Willis responded.

"Yes, it was a pretty big fish," said Jimmy. "It was about all he could do to fly away with it."

"That hawk was lucky not to have old King Eagle waiting for him," remarked the Storyteller. "By the way, who knows the proper name of the so-called fish hawk?"

"Osprey," replied Willis.

"Right," said the Storyteller. "By the way, Jimmy, did you notice how that bird was carrying the fish?"

Jimmy's response was prompt. "Yes, sir. He was carrying that fish in his claws with its head in the direction the hawk was going. I've noticed that before. Do fish hawks always carry fish that way?"

"Yes, Jimmy, I believe they do. I'm glad you noticed that. That is good observation," the Storyteller replied. "Have you any idea why the fish are carried in that manner?"

They thought this over for a few minutes. "I guess maybe it would carry easier against the wind that way," ventured Freddie.

"And I guess that maybe that is a pretty good guess," smiled the Storyteller. "Anyway you never will see an osprey carrying a fish tail first. It simply isn't done."

"Fish hawks keep other hawks away. That is what my grandfather says and I guess he knows," said Billy.

The Storyteller nodded. "There are places where the farmers put up cart wheels on the tops of tall poles in their dooryards as invitations to the ospreys

to build their nests there. These big birds mate for life and return each year to the old nest, adding a little to it each time until it becomes a huge affair. A great fisherman is Plunger the Osprey, a fact that old King Eagle long ago discovered and has made the most of. Eating only fish the big birds are not interested in the chickens. They won't allow other hawks of any kind near their nest and so of course the chickens are protected from such hawks as might have a desire for a chicken dinner. This is why the farmers like to have the ospreys about. Sometimes an osprey makes a sad mistake. You know it is sometimes said of a person that he has bitten off more than he can chew, which means that he has undertaken more than he can perform. Occasionally an osprey's greed overrules his judgment and he starts something he can't finish."

"How? What does he do?" Brother wanted to know.

"He strikes a fish so big that he can't lift it from the water, and he drives his claws in so deep that he can't let go," the Storyteller replied.

"And then what?" asked Frances.

"There is a combined tragedy of air and water. The bird drowns and the fish dies," replied the Storyteller solemnly.

"Oh, the poor things!" cried Jean.

"But that happens only once in a great while," the Storyteller hastened to explain. "Most ospreys are too smart to make any such mistake as that. I heard of one who was smart enough to get some men to do his fishing for him, and this is a true story." The Storyteller smiled at David.

"One of the men who caught the fish wrote me about it," the Storyteller continued. "It happened at a lumber camp up in the Maine woods. Some of the logging crew were fond of fishing and one evening after supper went down to the end of the pier to try for trout. The latter were not biting, but several chubs, a small no-account sort of fish, were caught and thrown back in disgust. The scream of an osprey was heard and the bird was discovered circling over the water a short distance out. 'Must be looking for a late supper,' said one of the fishermen. Just then the bird swooped down and picked up one of the chubs that had been thrown back.

"The next evening and the next the big bird was on hand circling high overhead, waiting for a dead chub to drift far enough out for him to feel safe in picking it up. The next evening none of the men went fishing. Some were playing cards and some were sitting around just loafing. It wasn't yet dark. 'Did you hear that?' asked one of the men.

" 'Hear what?' another asked.

“ ‘That hawk scream?’ replied the first one.

“ ‘Sure I heard it. What of it? He’s probably fishing as usual,’ said the other.

“ ‘Guess again, Jim,’ retorted the first one. ‘That bird isn’t down over the lake; he is right up here over the camp. Say, there are no dead fish down there tonight, for no one is fishing. Do you suppose he has come up here to try to get us to go down and catch his supper for him? It looks that way to me.’

“There was a general laugh and a lot of scoffing. Nevertheless two of the men took their rods and went to the lake. All the way the big fish hawk circled overhead. A chub was caught and thrown out on the water. It may have been imagination but it seemed to the men as if there was a note of triumph in the scream of the bird as he shot down and picked up the fish. When back at camp that evening the story was told an argument started among the lumberjacks. Some believed it and some scoffed. The result was that the next evening the whole camp was on hand to test the theory. No one went fishing. Sure enough, right on time came the scream of the osprey.

“There was a rush for the door to see where the bird was. It was directly over the camp, which was some distance back from the water. The fishermen took their rods and started for the pier, the bird following directly overhead. At the lake the bird circled high until a fish was caught and thrown out on the water, when it shot down and picked up the offering. The test was made several times, always with the same result. When the men went fishing immediately after supper the osprey never flew over the camp, but when the men remained in camp the big bird never failed to call them out.

“Now, Brother, where’s that story-log and of whom do you want a story?”

Brother promptly produced the log and wanted to know what the Storyteller had meant by saying that Old King Eagle had long ago discovered what a good fisherman Plunger the Osprey was and had made the most of it. “It sounds to me like a story,” he concluded.

The Storyteller admitted that there was one, and said that he was glad that Brother had reminded him of it. The story-log suddenly blazed up and into his eyes came the dreamy faraway look of one with a tale to tell of the long ago. And this is the story he told:—

"Oh who shall say to the King 'Nay, nay'?
Not I! Not I!
Oh who shall refuse the King his way?
Not I! Not I!
For the King is great and the King is strong,
And the King, you know, may do no wrong.

"As you all know, King Eagle rules over all the feathered folk. It always has been so for his father ruled before him and his father's father before that, and so on way back to the days when the world was young. For the most part King Eagle interferes little with his subjects. He does not have to be waited on as do kings among men. With one exception no one has to pay tribute to him. Of course you know what tribute is. It is a payment from the weak to the strong, a payment not offered willingly but demanded by the one to whom it is paid. Kings often demand tribute from those over whom they rule. Strong nations demand and collect tribute from weaker nations.

"King Eagle does demand tribute, but from only one and that one is by no means one of the smallest or weakest of his subjects. It is Plunger the Osprey. Yes, sir, Plunger is the one who has to pay tribute. He doesn't do it willingly. He does it because King Eagle is big enough and strong enough to make him pay. And the reason that King Eagle demands tribute is that he has a liking for fish but cannot himself readily catch them. And it all comes down from the long ago days when the first King Eagle discovered that fish were good eating but hard to get, for only now and then could he find one washed up on the shore. He had tried and tried to catch them alive in the water, but this he could seldom do. Old King Eagle was not a fisherman and never would be, and he knew it.

"Plunger the Osprey *was* a fisherman. He lived wholly on fish, nothing else. He wanted his fish fresh so he caught them himself. As time went on he became an expert in catching fish. Old King Eagle took note of this. One morning it came to him that he was hungry for fish, that nothing else would satisfy him. The more he thought about it the hungrier he grew and the more certain he became that nothing but a plump fish would satisfy that hunger.

"Sitting on a tall stub on the edge of a high cliff on the Great Mountain he could see for miles up and down the valley through which in the distance wound the Big River like a silver ribbon. Anyway it would have looked like a silver ribbon, and nothing more, to you or to me had we been in the place of Old King Eagle. But his eyes were so keen and so far-seeing that to him the

Big River looked to be just what it was. Sailing back and forth above it was what to us would have been a mere speck. The King recognized Plunger the Osprey.

“It was then that the idea of tribute first came to King Eagle. He chuckled. ‘My fisherman is fishing for me, but he doesn’t know it,” said he, and spreading his wonderful great wings he sailed out and up like the royal master of the air that he was.

“Up, up, up he flew until to anyone below he was no more than a speck in the sky. Round and round he sailed in great circles as high above Plunger as Plunger was above the Big River. Plunger, having his gaze fixed on the water below, was unaware of King Eagle above him. Plunger had thus far had no luck and at home, sitting on their precious eggs, Mrs. Plunger was waiting for him to bring her her breakfast.

“Patiently, as always becomes a good fisherman, Plunger flew back and forth and round and round above the Big River watching for fish, and above him, cloud high, King Eagle swung in great circles watching Plunger.

“At last the fisherman shot down to the water but the fish escaped. Later he plunged again with a great splash and for a moment disappeared. Then he began to flap heavily upward, heavily because gripped tight in his claws was a big fish. It was all Plunger could do to fly with it. King Eagle saw and with an exultant scream shot downward. Plunger heard that scream and the rustle of the great half closed wings and looked up.

“Tribute! Give me tribute! Drop that fish!’ screamed King Eagle fiercely.

“ ‘I won’t! It is my fish for I caught it!’ screamed Plunger.

“ ‘Tribute! Give me tribute!’ King Eagle demanded more fiercely than before.

“Still Plunger clung to the fish. ‘I won’t!’ he screamed again. This time there was an answering scream. It was from Mrs. Plunger. She had left the nest and was coming swiftly to his aid. So Plunger tightened his grip on the big fish and hoped that something would happen to cheat King Eagle of that splendid prize. He would not let go of it until he absolutely had to. No, sir, he wouldn’t.

“Now Plunger was a wonderful flier, but King Eagle was even more wonderful in the air and Plunger knew it. Despite this he did his best to outfly the King, but of course he couldn’t. He couldn’t even fly his best because of the weight of that fish. He dodged this way and that way. He flew up and up and dropped swiftly. All the time King Eagle kept right with him and wasn’t half trying. He would actually flap his great wings right in Plunger’s very face,

all the time commanding him to drop that fish. Mrs. Plunger did her best to interfere. She flew in King Eagle's way, screaming at him and calling him robber, thief, bully and everything bad that she could think of.

"At first King Eagle was only mildly threatening. He did not want to hurt Plunger. He had no quarrel with Plunger. And there was a purely selfish reason I suspect. He wanted that particular fish, but in the future he would want more fish. If he should disable Plunger there would be no one to catch those fish for him. So his whole idea was to frighten Plunger into dropping that fish.

"Plunger knew this, so he held on, hoping that King Eagle would lose patience and give up. At last King Eagle did lose patience, but with no idea of giving up. He began to lose his temper. His fierce eyes became even more fierce. Plunger's heart missed a beat and he shivered with fear.

" 'Stop fooling and drop that fish!' hissed King Eagle, and set his feet as if to strike with those terrible claws.

"With a scream of mingled rage and disappointment Plunger obeyed. Down, down, down fell the fish. King Eagle turned and shot after it. Just before it reached the water he clutched it. Then flying easily he made his way to the shore, there to eat his prize at his leisure. He had the tribute he had demanded. Plunger screamed at him angrily, then resumed his patient patrol above the water. There were more fish where that one had come from. From that day to this the ospreys have paid tribute of this kind to the eagles, and that is why when Jimmy told us of having seen Plunger catch a fish I said that he was lucky that King Eagle wasn't around. David, I believe it is your turn to bring the story-log next time."

"Yes, sir, I'll bring a log, but it won't be a story-log," said the small boy.

"Why not?" asked the Storyteller.

" 'Cause it will be a question-log like I said I'd bring when my turn came. So you better have that naturalist man here," replied David.

CHAPTER XI

The Shrews and the Whale

DAVID'S LOG was on the fire. Intently he watched it. At the first flicker of flame to show that it had begun to burn he turned to the Old Naturalist. "If you please, sir," said he, for David seldom forgot to be polite, "what is the largest animal in the world?"

"Ho, that's an easy one! It's the elephant," Willis broke in, then looked abashed as the Old Naturalist shook his head.

"It is the largest of the whales, a kind called the sulphur-bottom or blue whale, and it not only is the largest of all living animals but is one of the largest, if not the largest, that ever has lived," said he.

"But a whale isn't an animal. It lives in the ocean," cried Jean.

"So you think it must be a fish. Well, it isn't. It is a mammal, just as much a mammal as is a cow or a horse or a dog," said the Old Naturalist, smiling at the little girl.

"I don't know what a mammal is," Jean admitted.

"I do!" cried Frances. "It's an animal with hair, and its babies are given milk."

The Old Naturalist smiled. "That's it, my dear," he affirmed. "You have put it very simply. All living things are divided into two great kingdoms, the plant kingdom and the animal kingdom. Those not included in one must belong in the other. So a fish is an animal and so is a butterfly, but of course they are not mammals. Animal life is divided into branches, the highest of which includes all animals having backbones. These are called vertebrates and these are in turn divided into classes, the highest of which is occupied by mammals like the horse, cat, dog, mouse and so on."

"And man," added Willis.

"And man," agreed the Old Naturalist. "He heads them all. When people speak of mammals they seldom use that name but call them just animals. The whale, by the way, is both the largest mammal and the largest animal."

“A whale doesn’t have hair,” protested Jimmy.

“Not much I must admit, but I tell you what you do, Jimmy. The next time you meet a whale when you are in swimming just feel under his chin and you will find a few hairs scattered about there, just enough to get by on as a mammal,” chuckled the Old Naturalist, and all laughed.

David had another question ready. “What is the smallest animal in the world?”

“The smallest animal in the world, meaning mammal of course, is a tiny shrew. In case you don’t know what a shrew is, it is a little mouse-like creature in general appearance but with a sharp nose, a hot temper and a tremendous appetite.”

“I’ve seen one. Our cat brought it in,” said Freddie.

“Where does the smallest one live?” Nancy wanted to know.

“In Africa,” was the reply. “It is called the musk-shrew and is said to be the smallest mammal in the whole world.”

“How small is it?” Janet asked.

The Old Naturalist shook his head. “I don’t know,” he confessed, “except that I have seen it stated that it is smaller than an elephant’s toe nail. Anyway it is a tiny creature for it is smaller than its cousin over here, the common shrew, and that weighs only thirty-seven to forty-seven grains, and a grain is but a seven thousandth part of a pound.”

“How big is that biggest whale?” This was from Brother.

The reply was prompt. “That is a hard question to answer. Blue whales have been taken up to one hundred and three feet in length. Of course such a huge creature couldn’t very well be weighed, but from measurements it has been estimated that one of those largest ones might weigh between one hundred and twenty-five and one hundred and fifty tons.”

“Gee, what a lot of shrews it would take to make a whale!” exclaimed Billy. A general laugh followed.

“Work that problem out sometime,” suggested the Storyteller. “For convenience we’ll say the shrew weighs forty grains, and we’ll make the whale big, say one hundred and fifty tons. A grain is a seven thousandth part of a pound and a ton is two thousand pounds. How many shrews to equal a whale? Billy, I see a question right on the tip of your tongue. What is it?”

“I saw a rhinoceros in the circus last summer and ever since I have been wondering if that funny horn on his nose is ivory like the tusk of an elephant,”

said Billy.

The Old Naturalist shook his head. “No. It is quite different. An elephant’s tusk is of the same stuff as teeth. It really is a sort of tooth. The horn of the rhinoceros is hair, a development of matted hair, queer as that may seem. Mother Nature does many strange things.”

“I’ll say she does! Imagine a whale with chin whiskers and a rhinoceros with a horn made of hair on his nose!” Robert exclaimed. “It is hard to believe, but if you say it is so it must be so.”

“Of course,” said the Storyteller. “You may be sure that what our good friend tells you is every bit true. After all it is no more wonderful that that horn should have developed from hair than that a diamond and a piece of coal are of the same substance—carbon—only different forms of it.”

“I know a boy who says that if a horse hair is left in water long enough it will turn into a hair snake. Will it?” This was from Rosemary.

“That is a very common belief and on the part of some very intelligent people, but of course it is utter nonsense,” replied the Old Naturalist. “The hair snake isn’t a snake at all, but a sort of worm, long and quite hairlike. When I was a boy we youngsters used to put hairs from the tail of a horse in a tub of water. After a time we sometimes found hair snakes there and always forgot to look to see if the hairs were still there too. We just took it for granted that they had turned into those living hairlike things. Had we looked we would have found the hairs still there.”

“Then how did those hair snakes get there?” David wanted to know.

“They came by air,” chuckled the Old Naturalist, then explained. “Those worms, called nematodes, are parasites. You know parasites are creatures that live on or in the bodies of others. This worm, hair snake as you call it, lives in the bodies of crickets, grasshoppers and some other insects I guess. When one living in a grasshopper has become full grown it coils up near the end of the grasshopper’s body waiting for a chance to leave, for the time has come for it to deposit its eggs and strange as it may seem these must be deposited in water. So when its host is in or close to water the unwanted guest leaves. And that is how the hair snakes used to get in the tub of water and fool us boys by making us think that they were the hairs we had put in there.”

“Are bats blind?” Billy wanted to know.

“No, indeed. Far from it. They have very small eyes and they do not like bright sunlight, but whoever coined that saying ‘blind as a bat’ didn’t know his bats. A bat is a truly wonderful animal for it is the only mammal that can really

fly, and in some ways it can fly better than most birds," declared the Old Naturalist.

"How about flying foxes?" asked Jimmy.

"Just bats," came the prompt reply. "Not foxes at all but just the biggest members of the bat family. They live in Borneo and eat fruit, and are rather unpleasant-looking creatures, but are quite harmless."

Janet had a question. She explained that in the summer she had found a big worm carrying a lot of eggs on its back and that all the eggs were standing on end. She wanted to know why the eggs were carried that way.

"Do you remember what I told you a few minutes ago about parasites?" the Old Naturalist asked, to which Janet replied that she did. "All right," he continued. "What you saw was another example of parasites and an unwilling host. That was a caterpillar, not a true worm, and those were not eggs on its back but tiny cocoons woven of fine silk. Had you watched them long enough you might have seen the ends fly open like little doors and out of each issue a tiny gauzy-winged fly, and this is the way it all came about. A tiny fly just like those in the cocoons found that caterpillar. Under its skin she laid her tiny eggs. The eggs soon hatched into tiny grubs and the tiny grubs at once started to eat the fatty parts and the juices of the caterpillar, and there was nothing the poor thing could do about it.

"When the grubs were fed up, ready for that wonderful transformation which would turn them into tiny flies, they ate their way out through the skin and each spun a little silken cocoon wherein to go to sleep a lowly crawling thing, and to wake up a dainty little creature of the air."

"And what became of the poor caterpillar? Did it turn into a beautiful butterfly or moth?" Frances asked.

"It died," replied the Old Naturalist soberly. "Its strength was gone. It couldn't go through that wonderful change that would have turned it into a beautiful moth. This reminds me of a joke Old Mother Nature played on me once when I was a boy. It was in the fall. Peeping out from under a fallen leaf was the head of a green snake, or so I thought. When I stooped to pick it up I was one surprised boy. It wasn't a snake but a caterpillar, one end being shaped like the head of a snake and marked with spots like eyes. That was the caterpillar's protection. It might easily deceive an enemy just as it did me. I took it home and wrote about it to a friend who knew about such things, and he wrote back and told me its scientific name and suggested that I put it in a box, where it would turn into a chrysalis and in the spring become a lovely

butterfly.

"I did as he suggested. The caterpillar became a chrysalis suspended from the cover of the box, which I placed in a cool place. One day in the spring I happened to remember it and went to see if I had a beautiful butterfly in the box. It was then that for a second time I was a surprised boy. Instead of a beautiful butterfly that box contained a lot of black flies. The same thing had happened to that caterpillar that had happened to the one Janet found, only this was a different kind of caterpillar and it was a different kind of parasitic fly. The latter's eggs were deposited just before the caterpillar pupated. The grubs from these eggs ate the pupa changed into flies there, and then made their way out. Freddie, what is your question?"

"I've got a mud turtle for a pet. I keep him in a little pen with a dish of water, and offer him food every day but he won't eat. What is the reason?" replied Freddie.

"The poor thing probably hasn't water enough to eat," stated the Old Naturalist without a trace of a smile.

"But a turtle can't *eat* water," protested Freddie with a puzzled look on his freckled face.

"It may not eat water, but it certainly cannot eat without water and plenty of it," was the somewhat surprising reply. "You see for some good reason of her own Mother Nature has made it impossible for some of our common turtles, like the mud turtle and the snapping turtle, to swallow food unless they can take it under water. So your turtle should have water deep enough for the little reptile to take his food below the surface."

"Is it true that snapping turtles sometimes catch baby ducks when they are swimming?" inquired Robert.

"Not only baby ducks but a big snapper will sometimes pull down a half grown duck. They are bad actors, those snapping turtles. One lies in the mud at the bottom of a pond, and woe to the fish or frog who chances to come within reach of that ugly head which because of the long neck can be shot forward with the speed of a snake striking. Down in the rivers flowing into the Gulf of Mexico is a huge snapping turtle called the alligator snapping turtle. It grows to weigh more than one hundred pounds and could take a man's hand off in one bite. And he sometimes fishes with an artificial bait." The Old Naturalist paused.

"How?" demanded Billy.

"Attached to the inside of the lower jaw is a fleshy filament, white and

distinct from the yellowish mouth parts. This kept in motion looks much like the larva of some insect, a tempting tidbit for a hungry fish. The fish swims nearer to investigate. You can guess the rest."

"I've got it!" cried Frances, suddenly jumping up and holding out a piece of paper on which were some figures.

"What have you got?" asked the Storyteller.

"The answer—fifty-two-and-one-half million! It doesn't seem possible but it is. I know I haven't made a mistake." Frances was excited.

"Aw, say, have you gone nuts? What are you talking about?" demanded Brother.

"Why the shrews and the whale of course," snapped Frances. "What else could I be talking about? It would take fifty-two-and-one-half million shrews to make a whale weighing one hundred and fifty tons, and if you don't believe it you just look at these figures."

"Gosh!" said Jimmy. "Imagine that!"

"And all of you look at where that question-log was but isn't any longer," said the Storyteller. "Thank you, Mr. Naturalist. Do come again and soon. We'll always have a question-log ready, won't we, children?"

"We will!" they shouted as one.

CHAPTER XII

An Independent Gentleman

FRANCES, ROSEMARY AND JEAN arrived at the Old House somewhat breathless, their faces flushed, their eyes wide with excitement.

"We met Jimmy Skunk!" panted Frances.

"We almost ran right into him," Rosemary added.

"And he stamped his feet at us!" cried Jean.

"Is that all he did?" asked the smiling Storyteller.

"We didn't give him a chance to do more; we ran," confessed Rosemary.

"How Jimmy must laugh to himself to see the giants he meets turn and run," said the Storyteller.

"My grandpa wouldn't run," spoke up little Mary. "He says Jimmy is a gentleman, and if you're polite to him he will be polite to you."

"Your grandpa is right, Mary. Jimmy *is* a gentleman, independent but a gentleman just the same. If he is sure that you mean no harm to him he will do you no harm. I have known him to get his head caught in a tin can and allow the can to be pulled off without resenting the rough treatment required to set him free. I have known him to allow the removal of a steel trap from a badly hurt paw without showing the slightest anger even when he must have suffered considerable pain. He knew he was being helped and was grateful. Our forefathers in early colonial days knew, understood and respected this little American in black-and-white. On one of the early flags appeared Jimmy and this inscription: "I mind my bizness; you mind yourn." Just you remember that when you meet him and you never will have the least trouble."

The Storyteller paused to allow this to sink in, then added: "I never see Jimmy ambling along, never hurrying, minding his own business, unafraid, but that I think what a perfect example he is of what this great nation of ours should at all times be—adequately armed for *defense* but not for offense, and therefore respected by all, interfered with by none, and interfering with none. Yes, Jimmy Skunk is an independent gentleman. Would you like to hear the

story of how Jimmy came by his independence?"

Of course everybody would. Dishes were filled with popcorn, marshmallows were toasted and the fire invoked to burn the story-log. Presently the Storyteller began.

"The Merry Little Breezes, the children of Old Mother West Wind, hurrying up the Crooked Little Path, met Jimmy Skunk coming down, but as usual Jimmy wasn't hurrying. He seldom does hurry. He was looking for fat beetles for his supper and so he was walking very slowly. The Merry Little Breezes couldn't move slowly if they wanted to. Whatever they do they do in a hurry. Instead of walking they dance and skip and hop. They rush this way and they rush that way all the long day. Jimmy saw them rushing headlong to meet him.

" 'Hello Jimmy!' they shouted.

" 'Hello!' replied Jimmy, and then out of pure mischief he sprinkled them with just a wee bit of musk, that strong scent he carried with him. He knew they didn't like it and he knew that for a while at least they would have to take it wherever they went.

" 'Oh!' exclaimed the Merry Little Breezes in dismay. 'Jimmy Skunk, you are just as mean as you can be. We don't love you any more and we won't ever play with you again, so there!'

"Of course they didn't really mean that, but just then they thought they did. Instead of going on up the hill they turned back for the Green Meadows. Those whom they met turned aside and would have nothing to do with them. Jimmy Skunk watched them and chuckled. He was getting even, that was all. He was getting even for the many times that they had teased him by rumpling his coat and blowing his tail and whiskers. He chuckled again, then went on his way looking for fat beetles.

"But the Merry Little Breezes were no longer merry. They were disconsolate. The buttercups and daisies turned away their heads. Johnny Chuck and Peter Rabbit would not play with them. At last they came to the Smiling Pool. As usual there sat Grandfather Frog on his big green lily pad.

" 'Good evening, Grandfather Frog,' said the Merry Little Breezes very meekly. They feared that he too might turn away as the others had.

" 'Chuga-rum!' exclaimed Grandfather Frog in his gruffest voice. 'Jimmy Skunk, where are you?'

" 'He isn't here,' said one of the Merry Little Breezes. 'It is just us. We've got some of Jimmy's musk and no one will play with us. Everybody runs

away. You won't, will you, Grandfather Frog?'

"Grandfather Frog snapped up a foolish green fly that one of the Merry Little Breezes blew over to him. 'No,' said he, 'I'll not run away. In fact I rather like that scent when it isn't stronger than it is now. You see it is very like the odor of the plant that gives us the very first flowers of the spring, the skunk cabbage that grows in the swamp and often close beside the Laughing Brook. When folks smell that they know that spring is here to stay. Have you ever heard how Jimmy happens to have that strong musk and his independence?'

" 'No!' chorused the Merry Little Breezes. 'Tell us, Grandfather Frog. Please tell us.'

"Grandfather Frog settled himself comfortably on his big green lily pad, smoothed his white and yellow waistcoat, rolled his big goggly eyes, cleared his throat and began.

" 'Once upon a time when the world was young the first of all the skunks lived with his cousins, the weasels, minks and other members of the family, on the Green Meadows and in the Green Forest. He was young and handsome, was Mr. Skunk, and very proud of his black coat, for at that time he dressed all in black. He was quick, like his cousins, Mr. Mink and Mr. Weasel. His claws were stout and his teeth were sharp. People his own size, and some who were bigger, took care not to quarrel with Mr. Skunk. You see in those days, just as now, everybody had to look out for himself, but some were not as well prepared for this as they are today. Old Mother Nature was testing her children, teaching them to make the most of what they had and trying to find out what more they might need. She often does this to this day.

" 'So with neighbors of his own size Mr. Skunk was quite able to look out for himself and asked no favors. None could run faster than he or fight harder. He feared none of them. But in the Green Forest lived Mr. Wolf and Mr. Lynx and Mr. Panther and Mr. Bear. They were many times bigger and stronger than Mr. Skunk and he knew that any one of them would be glad to catch him for a meal any time. So always he lived in fear that some day he would not be quick enough or smart enough to keep out of the clutches of one of them, or that Mr. Bear might find his home and with his great claws tear that home open.

" 'Now Old Mother Nature had provided Mr. Skunk and his cousins, the other members of the weasel family, with tiny bags of strong scent of which they were fond, but which, unknown to them, was most unpleasant to other folks. It was Mr. Skunk who finally discovered this. He had just left a bit of this musk on a big mullein leaf to let his cousin, Mr. Mink, know that he had

been along that way, when who should appear coming down the Crooked Little Path but Mr. Wolf. Mr. Skunk hid in a hollow log from which he could watch Mr. Wolf.

" 'Mr. Wolf was hunting. He kept stopping to poke his nose into every bunch of grass and under every bush and clump of weeds to sniff that his nose might tell him from the scents they had left which of the little people, if any, had passed that way. When he came to the mullein leaf he sniffed once, sneezed, coughed, rubbed his nose and made a dreadful face. Then he went off in a hurry coughing and making a great fuss.

" 'Mr. Skunk chuckled to see him, but he was puzzled. What could be the trouble with Mr. Wolf? Mr. Skunk crawled out of the hollow log and ran down to the big mullein leaf. He smelled and smelled but he could smell nothing but the musk he had left there and which he liked. He was puzzled. Then it popped into his head that perhaps Mr. Wolf didn't like that scent. And if he didn't there might be others who didn't.

" 'That afternoon he left a little musk in Mr. Bear's favorite berry-patch. Then he hid where he could watch. Late in the afternoon Mr. Bear arrived to get his supper of berries. He sat down in the midst of the berry bushes and made ready to feast. Suddenly he sniffed. Then he made a face. "Whoof!" exclaimed Mr. Bear. "I guess I don't want any berries tonight," and off he went grumbling, coughing and rubbing his nose.

" 'As soon as he was out of sight Mr. Skunk came out of hiding and hurried home. The next morning he was up bright and early. His eyes snapped and twinkled as he started out to look for Old Mother Nature.

" ' "Good morning," said she as Mr. Skunk approached. "What can I do for you so early in the morning?"

" ' "If you please, I would like a larger bag of stronger scent," replied Mr. Skunk in his most polite manner.

" 'There was a look of wonder on Old Mother Nature's face as she exclaimed, "A larger bag of stronger scent! Pray why do you want a larger bag of stronger scent?"

" ' "It will be for protection," explained Mr. Skunk. "I think it will protect me from Mr. Wolf and all others who may seek to do me harm." Then he told her what he had discovered the day before. "I hope the scent can be very much stronger," he added.

" 'Old Mother Nature thought it over for a few minutes. Then she nodded and smiled. "All right, Mr. Skunk," said she. "I'll give you a larger bag of

stronger scent on condition that you never will use it unless you are certain that you are in danger, that you will without fail stamp a warning when others approach too near, and that you will not abuse your power, but will attend strictly to your own affairs and never meddle in the affairs of others."

" 'Mr. Skunk hastened to promise, and Mother Nature knew by the way he did it that he would keep his promise. She gave him a bigger bag and made the scent in it very much stronger. Two fingers held together she placed on the crown of his head and it became white. She drew the two fingers, gradually spreading them, down across his shoulders and along his back and they left two white stripes. "That is for the safety of all concerned; it is so that people will see you in the dark and not make the mistake of coming too near," she explained.

" 'Mr. Skunk thanked her and started back home. Just before he got there Mr. Wolf sprang out from behind a bush, showing all his long teeth in a horrid grin.

" ' "Good morning, Mr. Wolf," said Mr. Skunk politely, although his voice shook with fright.

" 'Mr. Wolf grinned more horridly than before. "It was nice of you to come along just now," he snarled. "You will make me a most welcome breakfast." He grinned again.

" 'Mr. Skunk was more frightened than ever, but he didn't forget to be polite. "If you please it will be best for you to stop right where you are," said he. Then, remembering, he stamped his feet in warning. Mr. Wolf merely grinned the more and took a step nearer. Then he wished he hadn't. Some of that scent had struck him full in the face. He fell right over on his back. Yes, sir, he did just that. He gasped and coughed and strangled, trying to get his breath. He rolled over and over in the grass. He was so nearly blinded that he couldn't see Mr. Skunk at all. Mr. Skunk hurried home.

" 'Mr. Wolf was in a dreadful fix. He couldn't get rid of that scent for a long time although he washed and washed. Mrs. Wolf wouldn't let him in the house. None of his friends would come near him. For a while he was an outcast and had to live by himself.

" 'Of course the story of what had happened to Mr. Wolf was soon known everywhere and all the meadow and forest folk took care not to offend Mr. Skunk. If he met Mr. Lynx on the Crooked Little Path Mr. Lynx politely stepped aside. If Mr. Bear saw him coming Mr. Bear always found that he had an errand in another direction. Everybody treated Mr. Skunk with the greatest

respect. He came and went as he pleased, when he pleased, where he pleased.

" 'Mr. Skunk always was polite. He never forgot to give warning that he was armed and not afraid. He never meddled in the affairs of other people. No longer having to hurry or to fight to get his share of food he grew fat and lazy, but always he was good-natured and his smaller neighbors liked him even better than before. From that day to this all skunks have been just like him, and that is how Jimmy Skunk whom you know got his independence and why he never hurries,' concluded Grandfather Frog.

" 'Thank you; thank you, Grandfather Frog!' cried the Merry Little Breezes. Then each in turn blew a foolish green fly straight into Grandfather Frog's big mouth."

Nancy drew a long breath. "I like that story," said she. "I saw Mrs. Jimmy once. She had five of the cutest little children with her. They were following her one behind another. She had her tail up and they had their tails up. It was the funniest little procession I ever saw."

"I know just how funny it was for I have seen a similar one more than once," said the Storyteller. "And now for another procession headed for—"

"Home!" Willis finished for him.

"And if you meet Jimmy Skunk on the way be as polite as he is and don't try to be too familiar with him," warned the Storyteller.

CHAPTER XIII

The Closing of a Door

IT WAS RAINING. There was a steady drip, drip, drip from the eaves of the Old House. The Storyteller opened the door to admit three of his guests. “My, my, my, what a night!” he exclaimed. “Put your umbrellas in the kitchen sink. I thought this rain would scare all of you away, but I see it didn’t.”

“Of course it didn’t and you didn’t really think it would. You know you didn’t. As if any of us would stay away on story night!” replied Frances.

“You know a bad night means a good story,” said Rosemary.

The Storyteller laughed. “I suppose that is a hint that the story must be extra good tonight. Who brought the story-log?”

There was a moment of silence broken by Billy in a tone of dismay. “There isn’t any story-log. It was little Mary’s turn and she isn’t here, and if she comes the log will be so wet it won’t burn, I betcha.”

Billy was wrong. Only a few minutes later little Mary appeared. Beneath her dripping raincoat she was hugging something to her. “It’s dry!” she announced as she unbuttoned her coat and drew out what proved to be the story-log carefully wrapped in newspapers.

“Hooray for Mary!” shouted Willis.

Having brought the log it was, of course, her privilege to say of whom the story should be. She named Striped Chipmunk.

“Huh! Why don’t you choose somebody we don’t know about? We know all about him,” said Brother.

“Do we?” asked the Storyteller quietly.

Brother looked a little shamefaced, but held his ground. “We know he has pockets in his cheeks and wears stripes and eats nuts and seeds and lives in the ground and sleeps most of the winter and is a member of the squirrel family. What more is there to learn?” said he.

“That you shall presently discover if you listen, for if Mary wants a story of Striped Chipmunk she shall have one,” declared the Storyteller. “And

laddie, remember that no one knows so much about anything that there isn't still something to be learned, and there always will be. Who knows who it is that Striped Chipmunk most fears?"

"Shadow the Weasel!" responded Jimmy and Freddie together.

"Correct," said the Storyteller. "Shadow is so small and slim that he can follow wherever Striped Chipmunk can go. From hawks and owls and foxes, in fact from practically all enemies but Shadow, he finds safety in his home down in the ground. But Shadow the Weasel can follow him there. Peter Rabbit had often wondered how under such circumstances Striped Chipmunk had managed to escape. One day he found out, and that is the story I will tell you tonight."

Little Mary clapped her hands. "Goody! I hoped Peter Rabbit would be in it!" she cried. At that moment the story-log burst into flame and the story began.

"Striped Chipmunk was busy. He was too busy to talk, as Peter Rabbit found out when he stopped for a bit of gossip. He was too busy to play, as the Merry Little Breezes soon discovered when they tried to tempt him.

'I've time for neither talk nor play,
So come again some other day,'

cried Striped Chipmunk as he whisked along the old stone wall on his way to a certain big hickory tree, and that was all that Peter or the Merry Little Breezes could get from him.

Peter followed and watched Striped Chipmunk scurry about among the fallen leaves that covered the ground like a yellow carpet. Whenever he found a nut his bright eyes sparkled with delight. He would first bite off the little sharp point on one end, for he had long ago learned that a nut with a sharp point on it was a most uncomfortable thing to carry in his mouth. Then he would stuff the nut in one of the pockets in his cheeks. When he had one in each cheek he took another in his teeth and scampered back along the old stone wall to a certain place, where he disappeared between the stones. Peter knew that somewhere down under those stones was the entrance to Striped Chipmunk's home.

"In a few minutes Striped Chipmunk's head would pop out from between those stones, he would pause just long enough to look this way and look that way to be sure that the way was safe. Then he would scamper back to the hickory tree as if he feared that those nuts would run away before he could get

there. Just watching him made Peter tired. It did for a fact. You know Peter hasn't a particle of thrift in him, and those who are not thrifty seldom like to work. Peter never thinks about tomorrow, so he cannot understand why anybody else should.

'Today is bright and fine and fair;
Why should I for the morrow care?
I'll take my pleasure while I may
Nor let tomorrow spoil today.'

So says Peter and doesn't see why others cannot be content to do as he does. This is because he is just happy-go-lucky.

"Striped Chipmunk isn't that way a bit, as you all know. He enjoys life just as much as Peter does, even more I suspect, for he knows the value of thrift. He is thrifty from his toenails to the tip of his tail. He never forgets that though today may be fair tomorrow may be stormy; that times of plenty are sure to be followed by times of scarcity and hardship; that if his storehouse has been filled with nuts and seeds and grain there will be nothing for him to worry about when outside no food can be found. So while there is work to be done he does it with might and main and is happy in doing it.

'Who works his best while work there is to do
Enjoys his play the more when work is through.'

and he always lives up to it.

"This is why that on this particular day he wouldn't stop to gossip with Peter or to play with the Merry Little Breezes. He had begun work at daylight and he intended to keep right on until the Black Shadows crept out from the Purple Hills. It was his purpose to store away as many of those fine hickory nuts as he could find, and he didn't intend to waste a single precious minute.

"After watching him for some time Peter wandered off to look for someone less industrious with whom to gossip. The Merry Little Breezes gave up trying to get Striped Chipmunk to play. Good-naturedly they shook the hickory tree to send down a shower of nuts, then danced away through the treetops. They didn't even wait for Striped Chipmunk to thank them for that shower of nuts.

"Back and forth, back and forth, along the old stone wall scampered Striped Chipmunk. It didn't seem that there was a single thought in that pretty little head of his for anything but the harvesting of those fine hickory nuts. When Peter returned a short time later Striped Chipmunk was working as hard

as ever. He didn't appear to be giving the least attention to anything else.

"But no one knows better than he that the price of life and happiness is everlasting watchfulness. Safety is more important than thrift. For that matter safety is really one kind of thrift, or perhaps it is the other way around and thrift is one kind of safety. You see those nuts stored away would make him safe from starvation when no food could be found elsewhere.

"However, if any harm should come to him while he was gathering those nuts they would do him no good. So all the time he seemed so intent on nothing but finding those nuts his bright eyes and sharp ears were alert for danger. So it was that when from not far away Sammy Jay screamed a warning Striped Chipmunk heard and heeded the very first alarm note. He had a nut in each pocket but he didn't wait to find more. He didn't wait a second to start for home as fast as his short legs could take him. He didn't even look back to see what the danger might be while he scampered along the old stone wall. When he reached the stones beneath which was the entrance to his home down in the ground he paused.

"Sammy Jay was still screaming and Striped Chipmunk knew that Sammy saw someone of whom there was reason to be afraid. It might be Reddy Fox. It might be Black Pussy the Cat. It might be a member of the Hawk family. Striped Chipmunk was curious to know who it was. He felt perfectly safe. None of these could follow him down under the old wall. No one bigger than himself could possibly squeeze through the doorway leading to his home. So now, unafraid but with lively curiosity, Striped Chipmunk waited and watched.

"Suddenly his bright eyes caught a glimpse of something moving. Now he could see it clearly. It was a small, slim, trim person in a brown coat running nimbly along the old stone wall straight toward him. One good look was enough. All curiosity vanished. In its place was cold fear clutching at his heart. That was Shadow the Weasel! That was the one enemy who could follow him right into his home under ground. With a squeak of terror Striped Chipmunk turned and dived down between the stones of the old wall. He knew that Shadow had found his scent and was following it along the stone wall and that it would lead straight to where he was, but there was nowhere else to go.

"Shadow the Weasel galloped along on top of the old wall with his little nose to the stones. He was following the scent of Striped Chipmunk as easily as you or I would follow footprints in snow. His eyes glowed red with savage eagerness to kill. He hadn't the least doubt that within a few minutes he would catch and kill Striped Chipmunk. When he came to the opening that led down to the entrance to Striped Chipmunk's home Shadow grinned wickedly. The

end of the chase was near.

"Sammy Jay, who had followed, saw Shadow disappear under the old wall. Sammy perched in a tree to watch for Shadow to come out and a feeling of sadness swept over him. 'There isn't anyone I will miss more,' said he sorrowfully to Peter Rabbit, who was sitting a short distance away, too frightened to move. 'Poor little Striped Chipmunk. That robber has followed him right down into his home and probably by this time has killed him there. He didn't have a chance, not a chance, for his life. He never harmed anybody. Just to hear and see him made everybody glad. Poor little Striped Chipmunk.'

"Presently Shadow the Weasel popped out of the opening between the stones where he had disappeared. Sammy blinked. Shadow didn't have the appearance of one who had had a good meal. Far from it. It was plain that he was in a bad temper. He looked up at Sammy and snarled. It was an ugly snarl. Then he galloped off in the direction of Farmer Brown's henyard. Sammy was too surprised to follow. He just sat there staring after Shadow and trying to account for the latter's rage.

"Some little time later he was still sitting there when a pretty little head was cautiously raised from between the stones above the entrance to Striped Chipmunk's home, and a pair of bright eyes anxiously looked this way and looked that way. Then as they discovered Sammy Jay a thin cautious little voice asked, 'Has he gone, Sammy?'

"Sammy nodded. Then, as if suddenly finding his tongue, he blurted out, 'Is that really you, Striped Chipmunk?'

" 'If it isn't I don't know who it is,' retorted Striped Chipmunk, his eyes snapping merrily.

" 'But—but—but how can it be? I mean however did you escape from Shadow!' stammered Sammy.

"Meanwhile Peter Rabbit had moved over nearer, his eyes fairly popping out of his head. 'Couldn't that fellow get into your house after all?' he asked. 'What did you do? You must have done something. Tell us what you did, Striped Chipmunk.'

"Striped Chipmunk's eyes twinkled and snapped. You know they are very bright eyes. 'I'll tell you just what happened if you'll promise to keep it a secret, and when I say secret I mean secret,' said he.

" 'We promise!' cried Sammy and Peter together.

" 'I simply shut a door; that's all,' said Striped Chipmunk. 'My bedroom way down in the ground is reached by a long gallery or hall. Opening from this

are other galleries, some leading to my storerooms. I ran into one of these side galleries and shut the door. How? Why I had some loose earth handy and I just plugged the entrance full. Shadow ran right past. Of course he didn't find me in my bedroom nor in the other galleries. I could hear him running back and forth past the closed door, but he didn't notice it and probably right now is wondering what became of me. When I was sure he had left I dug the door open and here I am. I fooled him. Now I wonder if it is safe for me to go for more nuts. I can't bear to waste so much time.' "

The Storyteller's eyes twinkled as he looked over at Brother. "I wonder," said he, "if any of us know any more about Striped Chipmunk than we did before."

Brother grinned. "Yes, sir," said he. "I do."

CHAPTER XIV

The Story of a Beautiful Coat

MERRIMENT REIGNED in the great living room of the Old House, the wholesome, wholehearted merriment of happy girls and boys. It had begun on their arrival on the very instant that the hospitable door had swung open to admit them and to tickle their delighted noses with a delectable odor instantly productive of prolonged sniffs and excited “ahs” and “ohs” of anticipation.

“Molasses candy! Boy, oh boy, am I glad I came tonight!” Willis shouted as he entered.

“There isn’t any candy yet and won’t be unless—” Their host, enveloped in a chef’s big white apron and wearing a chef’s cap, paused and in pretended anxiety looked around the circle.

“Unless what?” prompted Jean.

“Unless I have help, and it must be expert help,” replied the host solemnly.

A moment of uncertain silence was broken by Frances. “What do you want us to do?” she asked in a somewhat doubtful tone.

“Pull!” was the prompt response. “Is there anybody here who can pull molasses candy?”

“Me!”

“I can!”

“Try me!”

“I know how!”

When the clamor had subsided there was a scrubbing of hands at the sink and presently amid shouts of laughter everybody was pulling candy with might and main to determine who was champion. It proved to be Willis, and he was crowned with the chef’s cap.

“And now for the story-log! Who brought the story-log?” cried the Storyteller as he took off his big apron and led the way to the great fireplace before which each sought his or her accustomed place.

Janet had brought the log, and with proper ceremony it was placed on the

fire. When the Storyteller asked her of whom she would like a story she hesitated a minute.

"Haven't you anyone in mind?" the Storyteller asked.

"Yes, sir," admitted Janet, "but he doesn't live around here and—and—"

"And you are afraid that perhaps I don't know a story about him," finished the Storyteller, and smiled while the little girl blushed.

"Ho! Don't you worry. He knows stories about everyone, and if he doesn't he makes 'em up," Freddie broke in.

When the laugh that followed had subsided Janet named the flamingo, that long-legged, pink-coated bird of the tropics, now rarely seen along the seacoast of southern Florida where once it was a regular visitor. "It has such a lovely coat that I have wondered how it might have gotten it," she finished.

"I guess, Janet, that you are not the only one who has wondered about that," said the Storyteller. "You know that among us human folk there is a saying that 'clothes do not make the man,' and this is true, but not so with the flamingo. Without that beautiful coat it would be just about the homeliest bird I know of."

"I've seen some at the zoo, and they certainly are funny-looking birds," said Jimmy.

"The flamingo is what you might call a connecting link between the waders and the swimmers. It has long legs like the herons, which are true waders, and the feet are fully webbed like those of ducks and geese, which are swimmers," explained the Storyteller. "And now for the story of a beautiful coat.

"Redcoat the Tanager had spent some time in an apple tree beneath which Peter Rabbit was sitting. 'I don't believe that in all the Great World there is another coat as beautiful as that,' said Peter aloud. He was talking to himself, not having anyone else to talk to.

"Hummer the Hummingbird happened to alight on a twig above Peter's head just as that remark was made. 'That is what comes of never having traveled. What do you know of the Great World? If you said that up here in the Old Orchard there is no other coat as beautiful you might be nearer the truth, although there are plenty who wouldn't agree with you. You must have forgotten Glory the Cardinal. But I would have you to know, Peter Rabbit, that out in the Great World are many birds quite as handsomely dressed as either Redcoat or Glory,' squeaked Hummer. You know his voice is pitched so high that it is a real squeak.

" 'Are they dressed in red?' asked Peter. 'I do love red. Yes, sir, I do love

red. Be honest, Hummer, and admit that you never have seen any other red coats as handsome as are the two we have mentioned.'

"Hummer darted down from his perch and buzzed about Peter's head in a way that made him duck and dodge. 'I won't admit anything of the kind. I know of a number of coats as handsome as these coats, and with red in them too,' he squeaked.

" 'But you don't know of another coat so beautifully red!' cried Peter.

" 'Yes I do know of another coat so beautifully red, Mr. Smarty. What is more, if you ever should see that coat you wouldn't look twice at Redcoat or Glory,' snapped Hummer, who is quick-tempered.

" 'Who is he? Where does he live? Why haven't I seen him?' demanded Peter, and the tone of his voice showed that he doubted Hummer.

" 'He is Flamecoat the Flamingo,' retorted Hummer angrily. 'He lives—but what is the use of telling you where he lives? You wouldn't know any better if I did. If you ever had been anywhere you might understand. But it is useless to waste time talking to one who knows so little of the Great World.'

"Peter looked rather ashamed and hastened to apologize, for Hummer was showing signs of being ready to dart away. 'I'm sorry I seemed to doubt you, Hummer,' said he. 'Truly I am. Of course, if you say it is so, it is so. Please tell me about this Flamecoat. Does he live far from here? Is he as big as Redcoat the Tanager?'

"At this last question Hummer almost choked. He is quick to lose his temper and recovers it just as quickly. He saw that Peter was very much in earnest, so he excused himself for a few minutes and darted away to the nearest flowers for a sip or two of nectar. Then he returned to his perch just over Peter.

" 'Yes,' said he, smoothing his feathers as he talked. 'Yes, Flamecoat lives a long, long way from here. He lives so far down in the Sunny South that it is summer there all the year through. He lives near the great salt water, on the edge of it in fact. I have seen him when I have been passing that way to my winter home and on my way back. As for size—well, just imagine Longlegs the Great Blue Heron with a coat pink or red and you will have some idea of Flamecoat.'

"Peter's expression was funny to see. His eyes had opened very wide in astonishment. 'Oh, I say!' he cried. 'Are you telling me that Flamecoat is as tall and big as Longlegs the Heron, and all red?'

" 'Something like that,' replied Hummer. 'He is taller than Longlegs, for

his legs are longer. His neck is longer too, and he is practically all red.' Hummer began to chuckle. It was a funny little squeaky chuckle.

" 'What are you laughing at?' demanded Peter suspiciously.

" 'I was just thinking what an everlastingly homely fellow Flamecoat would be if it were not for that wonderful coat he wears,' replied Hummer. 'Down where he lives they do say that Old Mother Nature gave the first of all the flamingoes a lovely coat to make up for his homeliness otherwise, and the coat has been passed down in the family ever since. I heard the story the last time I was down there. Would you like to hear it?'

"Of course Peter would. Just imagine Peter Rabbit not wanting to hear a story! So he begged Hummer to tell him what he had heard way down in the Sunny South, and settled himself in comfort to listen. And here is the story.

" 'Way back in the beginning of things when the world was young Old Mother Nature made the first of all the different kinds of birds and animals, as you know. She made every kind of bird she could think of, long-legged birds and short-legged birds, long-necked birds and short-necked birds, broad-winged birds and narrow-winged birds, birds to live in trees and birds to live on the ground, birds with webbed feet for swimming and birds without webbed feet. At last she made Mr. Flamingo, the first of all his race.

" 'They whisper it about that Old Mother Nature didn't know her own mind that day. It looks as if she must have started out to make a duck or a goose, for she gave him big webbed feet. Then she must have changed her mind for she pulled his legs out long like a heron's, only longer. Now he had feet for swimming but legs for wading. Perhaps she was still thinking of the herons for she gave him a long neck, a very long neck, to match his long legs.

" 'When she reached his bill she must have done some experimenting, to judge by its appearance, for she certainly gave him one of the oddest bills in all the Great World. Instead of making it like a heron's, long and straight for spearing fish, she made it big and thick at the base and then about half way along she bent it down and did it in such a way that it humped up in the middle, looking as if it had been broken and then mended. Finally she finished it off by making it broad at the tip, something like the bill of a duck. Last of all she gave him a dingy sort of coat of dirty gray and brown.

" 'Homely! My word, he was homely! At least so they say, and I guess he must have been. He wasn't a duck and he wasn't a heron but in a way was little bit of both. When he flew he stretched his long neck straight out as a goose does instead of folding it back on his shoulders as Longlegs the Heron does

his. His long legs he carried straight out behind. He was so awkward and homely that everybody laughed at him and made fun of him. There wasn't one thing about him that was attractive.

" 'They say that Mr. Flamingo felt it. He felt it very much indeed, the more so because there wasn't anything that he could do about it. As much as possible he kept off by himself, away from the other birds. He used to stand out in shallow water on the mud flats and look at his reflection in the water and wonder why Old Mother Nature had made him so homely. Looking at that reflection he couldn't blame the other birds for making fun of him. They called him Mr. Homely.

" 'One evening, just as Mr. Sun was preparing to drop out of sight and go to bed, Mr. Flamingo stood all alone out on his favorite mud flat looking at his reflection and feeling very unhappy. Mr. Sun sank lower and lower, and for a little while painted the sky and clouds and all things that his rays touched with beautiful shades of red and pink. You know how it is when Mr. Sun goes to bed behind the Purple Hills.'

"Peter nodded and Hummer continued. 'It happened that Mr. Flamingo stood where some of those rays touched him. They transformed that dingy coat of his. Yes, sir, they did just that. They turned it to beautiful shades of red and pink. Not only his coat but his head, his neck, even his legs were beautifully colored.

" 'Two of his neighbors, who always had made fun of him and twitted him because of his homeliness, happened to pass that way and saw him. "What a pity it is," said one to the other, "that old Mr. Homely over there hasn't a coat like that all the time. Did you ever in all your life see anything so lovely?"

" 'Just then Old Mother Nature happened along. She overheard that remark. She grew thoughtful. She stood still and watched Mr. Flamingo. She saw how unhappy he looked and guessed why. Mr. Sun disappeared and of course all the lovely color left Mr. Flamingo. "So they call him old Mr. Homely," said Mother Nature to herself. "I guess I can't blame them for that. I don't know what I was thinking of when I made him. I don't for a fact. He looks as if I was trying to see how homely a bird I could make. We must do something about that. We certainly must."

" 'The next evening when Mr. Sun was getting ready for bed Mr. Homely was again out on his favorite mud flat. As before, the rays from Mr. Sun touched him and made him beautiful in shades of red and pink. Unseen Old Mother Nature moved up behind him. Just when the colors were brightest and most beautiful she reached out and passed her hand over him, making those

colors permanent. Then silently she withdrew and Mr. Homely knew nothing about it.

“ ‘The next morning he was surrounded by a chattering crowd of his neighbors. For once they were not making fun of him. Instead they were admiring him. It seemed to him that some even envied him. At least they said they did. He couldn’t understand it at all. It was the first time he ever had been admired and envied and he was sorely puzzled.

“ ‘At last he saw his reflection in the water, and couldn’t believe what he saw. From top to toe he was mostly red and pink save for some black feathers in his wings, which showed only when he flew, and for a black tip to his bill. He had one of the most beautiful coats in all the Great World. It was just as Mr. Sun had painted it. Never again was he called Mr. Homely. Instead he was called Flamecoat, and that name has been in the family ever since,’ concluded Hummer.

“ ‘Thank you, Hummer,’ said Peter. ‘I’m sorry that I doubted you. I never will again.’ ”

“The story-log’s gone!” cried Billy.

“And the story is ended,” said the Storyteller.

CHAPTER XV

Everybody's Night

WHEN THE CHILDREN arrived at the Old House a pleasant surprise awaited them. In his favorite seat in the chimney corner was the Old Hunter. It was his first visit this fall and he was given a royal welcome.

"Are you going to tell us true stories tonight?" David asked as he moved his seat over beside the Old Hunter.

The Old Hunter's eyes twinkled and the little laugh wrinkles appeared all around them. "You know I wouldn't tell you stories that are not true, but tonight I came to listen, not to tell stories at all," said he.

David's face fell. Other faces fell likewise. The Storyteller saw the disappointment. "I'm sorry, Mr. Hunter, but I fear you will have to tell us at least one story tonight," said he. He stooped and picked up a small log. "You see," he continued, "this happens to be a very special story-log. We haven't had one just like it before. This is everybody's log and whoever is called on must tell a little story or incident that they know to be true about our furred and feathered friends, and I warn you that probably you will be called on."

He turned to the others. "This goes for the rest of you," he added. "You see this log is of the kind of wood that snaps and makes many sparks when it burns. I'll start the storytelling, then the story-log will choose the next one."

He offered no explanation and when the suspense could be borne no longer Willis broke it. "How will that ol' log choose?" he demanded.

"By shooting sparks," replied the Storyteller. "The one toward whom the largest spark flies after I finish my story will tell the next one. It needn't be a long story, but it must be about something you have really seen or have heard and know to be true. So be prepared. No excuses will be accepted."

"I hope a big spark flies straight over to you, Mr. Hunter," said David, and the others shared the hope.

"This is the story of a deer who went to war," said the Storyteller as the log began to burn. "It is true in every particular and I will tell it to you exactly as it was told to me by an officer in the division of United States regulars of which

the little animal became the mascot. It is difficult to associate so beautiful and dainty a creature as a deer with the horrors of warfare, yet this one was right on the battle front during the World War. Here is the story:

"Fritz is what the boys named him and he was born near Hill 204, northwest of Château-Thierry, about June 6, 1918. He was a dwarf French deer and probably was only hours old when a member of Company B, Seventh Machine Battalion, Third United States Division, picked him up after his mother had been scared away by shell fire. The cook raised him on canned condensed milk, and other things to be obtained only by an army cook.

"This small deer was thought much of by all the men and went with them through all the battles from the Marne to the Rhine. From one of the French chemical masks a special mask was made for Fritz. He was French by birth but he was thoroughly American by adoption, and he was a soldier through and through. He would have nothing whatsoever to do with civilians or with allied soldiers. He would always come to a man in an American uniform. On the Rhine he disappeared. It was suspected that, having fraternized with some German deer, he found a sweetheart and eloped.

"That is the story, one of the few pleasant stories of the Great War. I like to think of this slim-legged little comrade doing his part amid the horrors of war. No one knows to how great an extent he helped by his trusting confidence to preserve the morale of his fighting comrades. Who loves animals must also love his fellow man, and when such love becomes universal there will be no more war. Now watch the sparks fly!" He reached over and poked the fire.

A big spark shot out and landed almost at Rosemary's feet, to her confusion. "I don't know a story," she protested, "excepting perhaps about a cat, and I guess you don't want a cat story."

"A cat story will be fine, my dear," said the Storyteller.

"It is of a cat my grandpa had when he was a boy, and he says that it is every word true," began Rosemary. "This cat's name was Clover and it was given to Grandpa when it was a little bit of a kitten. Grandpa was very fond of it and taught it a number of tricks. It would jump through a loop made of his arms, and it would play dead when told to, all but the tip of the tail; that never would keep still. Clover used to sleep with Grandpa and Grandpa's mother didn't approve of it. So one afternoon she said, 'I'm not going to have Clover sleeping with you any more. From now on he's got to find some other place than your bed to sleep.'

"Clover was sitting near at the time. Late in the afternoon he disappeared

and at supper time couldn't be found although he was in the habit of always being on hand then. Grandpa had to go to bed at eight o'clock. Before going, he went to the door and called and called; but no Clover. After the light was out and he was most ready to go to sleep he heard a thump underneath the bed and a few seconds later Clover was up on the bed and snuggling up in his neck. He had been hiding among the bedsprings on one of the slats.

"After that, late every afternoon the cat would disappear and every night after the light was out Grandpa would hear Clover drop out of the springs and a second or two later Clover would be in bed with him."

"Aw come, Rosemary, you don't expect us to believe that that cat understood what your grandpa's mother said, do you?" protested Jimmy.

"You can believe it or not, it is a true story. My grandpa says so," retorted Rosemary.

"Thank you, Rosemary. I believe that it all happened just as your grandfather says," said the Storyteller quietly. "Perhaps it was just coincidence that Clover picked that day to form that habit of hiding among the springs of the bed. But we never know just how much animals understand or sense what we say. Now for the next spark, let it fall where it may."

He poked the fire and this time there was a shower of sparks and an eager craning of necks to see to whom the biggest one was nearest. It proved to be Jimmy. He tried to poke it in front of Frances but was not quick enough. "Your turn, Jimmy! Come across with a story," said the Storyteller, and somewhat sheepishly Jimmy did.

"It isn't much of a story; it is just about something that happened at the home of a feller I know. They have a gas range there and one morning the maid lighted the oven burners. She closed the oven door of course, but in a couple of minutes opened it 'cause she thought she heard a noise in there. She did, too, for when the door opened out jumped a gray squirrel almost in her face. Scared her pretty near into fits, and the squirrel himself was just as scared. I've heard of broiled live lobster but that squirrel came pretty near to being broiled live squirrel. He had climbed down, or fallen down, the chimney and had crawled into the pipe from the stove and along to the elbow where the pipe bent and led straight down to the stove. He had tumbled down here and couldn't get back. He was just plain stuck. When the oven burners were lighted the vent from the oven leading to that pipe automatically opened and the squirrel dropped down into the oven. It was lucky for him that the maid didn't leave the room while the oven was getting hot. And that's a true story, every word of it."

“Of course it is, and rather an extraordinary one,” said the Storyteller. “I’m glad you thought of it. I myself know the man in whose house that happened, and it was just as you have told it. Had the stove been of the old-fashioned kind that burns wood or coal the incident wouldn’t have been so remarkable. The pipe from a stove of this kind is large, with plenty of room for a squirrel. I have known of several abandoned houses in which squirrels had made their nests in the fireboxes of the kitchen stoves. A family I know of opened their summer cottage which had been closed all winter. A noise was heard in the stove. A lid was lifted and there in the firebox was a whole family of gray squirrels. As the young grew they had great fun scampering back and forth through the stovepipe and playing with the damper.” The Storyteller paused, then reaching out stirred the fire.

This time a spark flew over to land on the hearth right in front of Nancy. She was ready for it. “This is about a cat who mistook a hose for a snake,” she began. “The cat’s name was Tuffy and he was a great big cat and he never hunted birds. One day he was taking a nap in a basket in the laundry. His master wanted to water the lawn and brought one end of the hose through the laundry window to screw on one of the laundry faucets. The rest of the hose was coiled on the ground just outside the window. Tuffy was disturbed. He got up and slowly walked out the door and up the steps, grumbling as he went. At the top of the steps he sat down and switched his tail around and looked kind of sulky. Right beside him was that black rubber hose coiled like a great black snake with the nozzle for a head.

“Just then Tuffy’s master turned the water on and off quick. It made the coils swell and jump a little, and the nozzle move a little and hiss. Right up in the air went Tuffy, and when he hit the ground again he was off like a streak, a scared cat if ever there was one. But he didn’t go far before putting on the brakes. He turned around. He crouched close to the ground. His ears were laid back, his tail was swelled up, he was showing his teeth and growling. Then he began to creep forward the way a cat does, slowly, a step at a time.

“All of a sudden he leaped on that big ‘snake,’ dug the claws of all four feet into it and bit the back of the neck. The water was turned on and right off. It made the hose move. Tuffy jumped off, then stood glaring at it, ready to fight. It didn’t move any more so Tuffy smoothed down and triumphantly walked off around the corner of the house.”

“Splendid!” cried the Storyteller. “And now for the next.”

Snap! A live coal landed at the Old Hunter’s feet and lay there glowing red. “Hurrah!” cried David.

“Your turn! Your turn!” chanted a chorus of voices.

The Old Hunter cleared his throat. “Well, well,” said he. “This is something I hadn’t counted on. I sort of figured on sitting quiet tonight, just listening. I don’t know what that pesky fire had to butt in for. It could just as well have tossed that coal somewhere else. I haven’t any story equal to that one about the deer in the war. That critter certainly was most surprising in the way it acted. But you never can tell what these folks who wear fur and feathers aim to do next. Some of them are pretty smart. I’ve heard folks say real positive, as if they knew all about it for a fact, that animals don’t think. Well, I know better.

“Just take the case of the little spike-horn buck up in a lumber camp I knew of. If he didn’t do some thinking then I don’t know what thinking is. Folks who spend as much time in the woods as I do see a lot of things, many of them sad, but some funny. Now that little spike-horn buck for instance; the way in which he put it over on an old doe was both funny and an indication to me that he did some thinking.

“Deer are just as crazy for salt as most kiddies are for candy. I guess you know that. There were deer around this lumber camp I spoke of and an old stump in the clearing had been salted. This means that rock salt had been put on and around it. Deer used to come to it regularly although it was only a short distance from the cabins. One old doe became very tame.

“Along about sunset one evening this little spike-horn, his spikes still in the velvet, appeared and began licking salt and eating around the old stump. He kept raising his head to listen and looking over toward the woods. By and by out comes the old doe. She comes straight over to the young buck and when she gets near enough she rears up and makes a vicious pass at him with her front feet. That is the way deer fight. You know those hoofs have mighty sharp edges.

“Well, the youngster dodges and beats it down an old logging road for a distance. He stops to look back at her and then he goes to eating grass. The old doe doesn’t pay any attention to him. By and by he looks up and watches her for a minute. When she has her back to him he suddenly starts back up the road on the jump the way a badly frightened deer runs. The old doe hears him coming. She throws up her head and blows the way a startled deer does, and without looking back she beats it for the woods and disappears.

“At once the youngster slows down. He walks over to the stump and begins to feed around it again. After a bit the old doe comes stealing back cautiously, looking for the cause of her fright. Of course she sees nothing but

the young buck feeding there. She goes over and once more drives him off.

“Well the youngster is smart. He watches and when the time is ripe he pulls that trick over again, and it works just as before. Three times he pulls it before the old doe gets wise. The whole performance was watched from one of the cabins. It was funny enough. Now did or did not that young spike-horn think? What do you say?”

“He did,” declared Robert, and the rest agreed.

“I think so myself,” said the Old Hunter.

“And I think that everybody’s log has been a great success,” said the Storyteller. “Now home with you or there will be no story night next week, and that would be just too bad for I have a perfectly good bear story that I know you will want to hear.”

“May I come?” asked the Old Hunter.

“Of course. We’ll be delighted to have you come. Won’t we?” said the Storyteller.

“Of course!” shouted the children.

CHAPTER XVI

Buster Bear's Sugar Party

THERE WAS EXCITEMENT in the Old House, the excitement of pleasant anticipation. Around the great fireplace were gathered the children. Not one was missing. The Old Hunter was there, and when the door was opened to the sound of the iron knocker the Old Naturalist entered to be greeted with a shout of welcome.

In the fireplace was a great bed of glowing coals above which swung from the long black arm of the iron crane a big black kettle also of iron. From this arose a delectable odor productive of long sniffs, one that made mouths water. It was maple syrup being boiled down to sugar. The Old Hunter was in charge because, so the Storyteller explained, he was an old hand at boiling down sugar. Expertly he fed the fire with small chunks of hard wood to keep a steady even heat.

"Hard wood makes the best coals, the hottest and the ones that last longest," said he, "and coals are better than a blaze for cooking over. Of course this isn't the time of year for regular sugaring. That is in the spring when the sap is running. You know that. But when you have the syrup you can sugar off any time. Nowadays the sap is boiled down in what are called evaporators, but when I was a boy and lived way back in the country we used to boil it down just this way only in a huge kettle out of doors. There was a lot of hard work sugaring, but a lot of fun too. The smell of this boiling syrup brings those old times right back as if they were yesterday." He drew a long sniff and a succession of sniffs ran around the circle.

Presently the syrup was pronounced ready for pouring into the shining molds the Storyteller had provided, and these were set out of doors to cool. "While we are waiting for that sugar we'll put the story-log on and see if it will give us a story as good as I know that sugar is going to be," said the Storyteller.

"It is to be a bear story. You said so," prompted Billy.

"So I did," replied the Storyteller. "So I did. This party of ours tonight

reminds me of another sugar party, Buster Bear's sugar party. You know Buster has a sweet tooth, just as sweet a tooth as any of you have."

"He likes honey," volunteered Billy.

The Old Hunter chuckled. "I surprised him up in a bee tree once when I was a boy," said he. "You know a bee tree is a hollow tree in which wild bees have made their home. Buster was up there trying to tear it open so as to get the honey. He was growling and whimpering and those bees were humming around him in a cloud and swarming all over him, mad clear through."

"What did he do when you s'prised him?" asked David.

The Old Hunter chuckled again. "He surprised me. He started to back down that tree in a hurry, but when he wasn't more than half way down he just let go and dropped. He landed with a thump that ought to have knocked the wind out of him but didn't. He was on his feet before you could say scat and turned and—" He stopped to scan the excited faces.

"And what? What did he do?" Jean asked a bit breathlessly.

"He ran. So did I. He ran one way and I ran another and to this day I don't know which was the most scared or which ran the fastest," the Old Hunter finished, and laughed at the memory.

"Who knows in what time of the year baby bears are born and how big they are?" the Storyteller asked. No one knew but there was a lot of guessing that brought smiles to the faces of the Old Naturalist and the Old Hunter. "Supposing you tell us, Mr. Naturalist," said the Storyteller.

"Baby bears come into the world in the middle of winter and usually they weigh only half a pound or a little more," replied the Old Naturalist and smiled at the exclamations and gasps of astonishment. "Usually they are born in the latter part of January or early in February while Mother is still hibernating. They are born blind, like kittens and puppies and many other babies among the wild folk, and it is forty to forty-five days before they open their eyes. They are three months old, perhaps a little more, before they venture outside the den in which they were born. My goodness, what lively youngsters they are after they have been out a little while! For getting into mischief a monkey has nothing on a little cub. Usually there are two, and when Mother wants a little peace she sends them up a tree while she goes looking for food. If they disobey her and come down before she calls them down they are likely to be spanked or soundly cuffed. She is a good mother in more ways than one, for while she takes good care of her children she doesn't spoil them. Now, Mr. Storyteller, this is enough from me. Please put that story-log on the fire, for there isn't

anybody here more anxious to hear about Buster Bear's sugar party than I am."

The Storyteller complied and as the log began to burn the story started. "One day when Buster Bear and his twin sister, Woof Woof, were just about big enough to think they knew all there was to know—perhaps some of you know just about how big that was—Mother Bear promised them, if they would be good all day, that on the next day she would take them on a picnic where the blueberries grew, and you know that there is nothing, unless it is honey, that bears like more than they do blueberries.

"That was the hardest day Buster Bear ever had spent, trying to be good all day, but he was good, and early the next morning Mother Bear sent them down to the Laughing Brook to wash their faces and hands. Buster had to go twice. You see he didn't get his clean the first time. Then she led them over a hill, across a valley and over another hill to the place where the blueberries grew. All around the ground was blue with them. My, how those little mouths watered at the sight.

"Pretty soon another mother bear with two children arrived, and then two more mothers, each with twins, so that there in the berry-patch were four great big mother bears and eight little bears, the latter about of a size. The mother bears told the little bears that they might eat all the berries they wanted, but they must not leave the berry-patch. Then the four big bears went off by themselves where they could forget the cubs for a while.

"The cubs had a wonderful time stuffing themselves with berries. When they couldn't eat another one they did just what boys and girls like to do after a hearty meal—lay down for a nap. But who would want to sleep for long at a picnic? Not Buster Bear. After a short, a very short, nap he awoke and out of pure mischief he awoke all the other little bears. And then such fun as they had! They played tag and hide-and-seek. They rolled over and over down hill. They turned somersaults and wrestled and boxed. They had a wonderful time, did those eight little bears.

"By and by Buster grew tired of playing. Off at one side were some big trees. He wondered what might be over there among those big trees. He remembered that once Mother Bear had found some honey in a big tree. So, forgetting what Mother Bear had said about not leaving the berry-patch, he slipped away and went over among those big trees. There he found something he never had seen before. It was a little house, a sugar house where maple syrup and sugar were made, for those big trees were sugar maples. He sat up and stared in round-eyed wonder at it. Then he ran back to where the other little bears were. 'Come see what I've found! It's the queerest thing you've

ever seen,' he cried.

"Now the other little bears were tired of playing too. They caught Buster's excitement. They, too, forgot that they were not to leave the berry-patch and they raced after Buster as fast as their legs could take them. When they reached the sugar house they all sat up and stared just as Buster had.

" 'I wonder what that thing is,' said one little bear in a scared-sounding voice.

" 'I don't know but I'm going to find out,' replied Buster Bear.

" 'You dasn't! You know you dasn't!' cried another little bear.

"This was enough for Buster. 'I'll show you,' he growled and while all the other little bears held their breath he walked straight up to the door of the sugar house. The door was closed, and of course nothing happened. This made Buster bold. He prowled all around the little house sniffing and snuffing at every crack, and it seemed to him that he smelled something good. Somehow it reminded him of honey and made his mouth water.

" 'I wish I could get in there," said he. But look as he would he could find no place to enter.

"Now up over the door was a little window and it was open. Presently one of the other little bears spied it. 'There's a hole up there!' he cried.

"Buster looked up. It was just about big enough for him to crawl through. 'I'm going to climb up in there,' said he.

" 'You dasn't!' cried the same little bear who had dared him before.

" 'Huh! Just you watch and see,' growled Buster.

"Now it wasn't much of a climb for such a lively climber as Buster Bear and in almost no time at all he was up at that little window. He poked his head inside and stared until his eyes grew accustomed to the dim light. No one was to be seen but a frightened little wood mouse who scurried out of sight. Buster sniffed and sniffed and with every sniff his nose was tickled by that delicious smell he had found at the cracks below.

" 'What's in there?' chorused the seven little bears sitting in a half circle down below and staring up at Buster with admiration for his boldness.

" 'I don't know, but I'll tell you in a minute,' replied Buster, and in he went. They heard him scramble down inside. For a couple of minutes all was so still that the seven little bears waiting outside could hear the beating of their own hearts. Then from inside came a voice. It was a muffled voice, but it was Buster's voice all right. There was no doubt about that.

“ ‘Oh-oo-oo! Um-m-m! Yum, yum!’ Buster sounded as if his mouth was full of something. ‘Um-m-m, um-m-m, it’s as good as honey. Come on in and get some!’

“At the word ‘honey’ seven little bears looked at each other, seven little paws went up to seven little mouths and seven little mouths began to water. Then started a mad scramble to see who could get up to that little window first. Such a sight! Up they went, those seven little bears, one right at the heels of another and sometimes two trying to squeeze through that hole at the same time.

“When they were down inside they found Buster clinging to the side of a big barrel, scooping something out of it, and cramming this into his mouth as fast as he could. It was soft maple sugar that had been left there to be taken into a lumber camp in the fall.

“At the first good whiff of that sugar the seven little bears forgot their manners. Oh dear, dear, such a sight! They crowded around that barrel pushing and shoving and pulling. They scratched each other. They bit. Yes, sir, they did. They so far forgot themselves as to bite. They whined, they growled, they grunted. Sometimes they squealed and sometimes they snarled. They were like so many unmannerly little pigs.

“All the time they were clawing at that sugar, and whenever one could get a pawful it was crammed into a greedy little mouth. They upset the barrel and it rolled against a great pile of sap pails. Down came the pails with a terrible clatter. They banged the noses and the toeses of some of those little bears and for a minute frightened them half to death. But it was for only a minute. Then they were back at that barrel, some of them actually trying to crawl right into it.

“Now in one corner was another barrel. This barrel was standing on end and down near the bottom was a spigot, which you know is a sort of faucet, for drawing off what was in the barrel. What do you think was in it?”

“Maple syrup!” chorused the listeners.

“Yes, sir, that is just what it was—maple syrup,” agreed the Storyteller. “In the scramble and the fighting for the sugar one little bear pushed another little bear so that he fell against that spigot and knocked it out of the barrel. Out poured a stream of golden syrup and made a big puddle on the floor. Buster was the first to discover what it was. He stepped in it. Then he sniffed at it. Finally he tasted it to see what he had stepped in.

“ ‘Oh-oo-oo! Um-m-m!’ he exclaimed, but not too loud, for he wanted this

new treat all to himself as long as possible."

"The selfish thing!" cried Jean.

"Presently another little bear who had been crowded away from the sugar discovered what Buster was doing and he tasted the syrup," continued the Storyteller. "One taste was enough to make him forget all about the sugar and he began lapping up the syrup as greedily as Buster. Then others discovered what was going on and soon all those little bears were crowding and pushing around that puddle of syrup on the floor just as they had around the sugar barrel.

"First one and then another would slip and fall down in that syrup and so get all covered with stickiness. Every one of them was smeared from head to foot. Never in all the world were eight such-looking little bears seen before.

"Now all this time the four mother bears had been gossiping while they ate berries and time slipped away faster than they realized. When at last they went to look for the little bears they couldn't find them. Finally Buster's mother found their tracks and her nose led the way straight to the sugar house among the great maple trees.

"My, my, my, such a racket as was going on in that sugar house! There was a rattling and a clattering, a thumping and a bumping, whines and squeals and grunts, growls and snarls. The four mothers were sure that something dreadful was happening to their darlings. They rushed around the sugar house trying to find the way in. At last they found the door and broke it in. Then in rushed four as angry big bears as ever lived. They were ready to tear to pieces whoever had dared to frighten or hurt their children.

"Just inside they stopped short gasping with surprise at what they saw—eight such-looking little bears backed up against the wall! Eight little faces smeared with sugar and syrup were turned anxiously toward them. Eight little stomachs were swelled out like eight little balloons. Eight little coats—well, they were the worst looking little coats that ever any little bears wore. The fur was every which way, matted with syrup and sugar, covered with dirt from the floor, ashes from the fireplace, bits of bark and dead leaves from the woodpile. Never were any such-looking little bears seen before.

"Once more the eyes of the four mother bears snapped with anger. They were relieved, wonderfully relieved, to find their darlings were safe. Of course. But this very relief made them angry. It works that way sometimes. They were angry because they had been so needlessly frightened, and because—why, because they had been disobeyed.

“Straight toward those eight little bears they marched. The eight little bears began to whimper. Suddenly one of them started to run for the open door. A slap from one of his mother’s big paws helped him along squalling at the top of his lungs. In a jiffy seven other little bears were bumping into and tumbling over each other and squalling with all their might as they scrambled for the open door, each helped along by slaps from big mother paws.

“Then while outside eight little bears whimpered and whined, and snarled at the leaves and twigs that persisted in sticking to their feet, inside the four mother bears looked to see what mischief the youngsters had been getting into. Now big bears are just as fond of sweets as little bears. There was still some sugar and syrup left, so for a while the four mother bears were too busy to give a thought to the unhappy little bears outside.

“When the last bit of sugar and the last drop of syrup had disappeared the four mothers licked their lips, looked at each other and grinned. Of course those eight disobedient little bears richly deserved to be spanked, but—well, children wouldn’t be children if they didn’t get into mischief once in a while. Besides, but for them this delicious treat wouldn’t have been found. So for this once they let the little bears off.

“But late that night eight little bears twisted and turned and wiggled and squirmed in their beds, and whimpered and whined and wondered how such very big pains could get into such very small stomachs, and if they ever, ever would get their coats clean again. And they wondered, too, if ever again Buster Bear would have another sugar party. Strange to say, way down in their hearts they hoped he would.”

The Storyteller ceased. The last of the story-log flared up in a tongue of yellow flame that flickered a moment and went out. A gentle sigh of pleasure escaped the listeners.

“Gee,” said Willis, “that was the best story ever.”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *While the Story-Log Burns* by Thornton Waldo Burgess]