

WALSH GEORGE E.

WASHER THE RACCOON

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INTRODUCTION TO THE TWILIGHT ANIMAL STORIES

By the Author

All little boys and girls who love animals should become acquainted with Bumper the white rabbit, with Bobby Gray Squirrel, with Buster the bear, and with White Tail the deer, for they are all a jolly lot, brave and fearless in danger, and so lovable that you won't lay down any one of the books without saying wistfully, "I almost wish I had them really and truly as friends and not just storybook acquaintances." That, of course, is a splendid wish; but none of us could afford to have a big menagerie of wild animals, and that's just what you would have to do if you went outside of the books. Bumper had many friends, such as Mr. Blind Rabbit, Fuzzy Wuzz and Goggle Eyes, his country cousins; and Bobby Gray Squirrel had his near cousins, Stripe the chipmunk and Webb the flying squirrel; while Buster and White Tail were favored with an endless number of friends and relatives. If we turned them all loose from the books, and put them in a ten acre lot—but no, ten acres wouldn't be big enough

to accommodate them, perhaps not a hundred acres.

So we will leave them just where they are—in the books—and read about them, and let our imaginations take us to them where we can see them playing, skipping, singing, and sometimes fighting, and if we read very carefully, and *think* as we go along, we may come to know them even better than if we went out hunting for them.

Another thing we should remember. By leaving them in the books, hundreds and thousands of other boys and girls can enjoy them, too, sharing with us the pleasures of the imagination, which after all is one of the greatest things in the world. In gathering them together in a real menagerie, we would be selfish both to Bumper, Bobby, Buster, White Tail and their friends as well as to thousands of other little readers who could not share them with us. So these books of Twilight Animal Stories are dedicated to all little boys and girls who love wild animals. All others are forbidden to read them! They wouldn't understand them if they did.

So come out into the woods with me, and let us listen and watch, and I promise you it will be worth while.

STORY ONE

WASHER'S FIRST ADVENTURE

Washer was the youngest of a family of three Raccoons, born in the woods close to the shores of Beaver Pond, and not half a mile from Rocky Falls where the water, as you know, turns into silvery spray that sparkles in the sun-shine like diamonds and rubies. And, indeed, the animals and birds of the North Woods much prefer this glittering spray and foam that rise in a steady cloud from the bottom of the falls to all the jewels and gems ever dug out of the earth! For, though each drop sparkles but a moment, and then vanishes from sight, there are a million others to follow it, and when you bathe in them they wash and scour away the dirt, and make you clean and fresh in body and soul.

Washer had his first great adventure at Rocky Falls, and it is a wonder that he ever lived to tell the tale, for the water which flows over the falls is almost as cruel and terrible as it is sparkling and inviting. But Washer knew nothing of this then, for he was a very young Raccoon, and not quite responsible for all he did. Perhaps it was Mother Raccoon that was to blame, for it was her duty to look after her little ones until they were old enough to hunt for themselves. It is a law of the woods that any mother of bird or animal who neglects its young shall be punished.

The nature of the punishment has never been told, but in the

case of Washer's mother you can easily guess what it was. It was an uneasy conscience that her neglect had caused her child's death, and she would never see him again.

But Washer apparently had as many lives as a cat, for he was not killed, and he lived long after his mother had given up all hopes of ever seeing him again. No one—certainly no Raccoon—had ever gone over Rocky Falls, and been heard of afterward. Therefore, Washer was dead. Mother Raccoon believed that, and reported the sad news to all her family and friends.

It was a bright, sunny day. Washer had been playing near the edge of the river above the falls with his two brothers—playing very much as three boys or three girls would do if let loose in the woods. They were only baby Raccoons, and could not run very fast, and every time they dipped a paw in the water they squealed and made a great noise.

It was perfectly safe near the shore, for a big tree blown down by the wind cut off the swift current of the river and formed a little back eddy. Mother Raccoon had told them they could wade around in the shoal water, but she didn't say anything about not going in anywhere else.

Washer did not think he was doing anything wrong, therefore, when growing tired of wading he crawled far out on the end of the big tree lying on its side to watch the swift current flowing by. Pieces of drift-wood, twigs, knots and sticks of wood of all sizes passed him in an endless procession. He snatched at some of these with his paws, and caught one or two.

Each time he was successful, he squealed with delight. Of course, he grew bolder and more reckless until finally he stood on the end of the very last branch of the fallen tree. From there he could reach more sticks floating down stream. One particularly big one attracted his attention. It was a little further out than the others, but Washer was sure he could reach it.

But he missed it by an inch, and the force of the blow with his paw at the stick unbalanced him. He clutched frantically at the tree branch. It broke off close to the trunk, and Washer toppled over into the deep, dark stream.

When he came up to the surface, he squealed as loud as he could: "Help! Help!"

His two brothers playing inshore heard the cry, but they thought it was one of Washer's tricks, and they paid no attention to it. But Mother Raccoon, who had been dozing in the bushes, was quick to note the cry of alarm, and she sprang up a stump to look around.

She had just one last glimpse of Washer. He was in the river, struggling to crawl upon the big board that had caused his mishap. Then board and Raccoon disappeared in the smother of the rapids, which began just above the falls.

Mother Raccoon ran frantically along the banks of the river, calling to Washer, but she knew there was no help for him. Nothing that she could do would rescue him from the terrible adventure ahead.

Washer himself was more surprised than frightened at first.

He was not exactly afraid of the water, and the ducking didn't bother him; but when he managed to climb upon the board and looked around he began to feel more frightened than surprised. His frail boat was being twisted and whirled around like a top, making him dizzy; the shore was rushing past him, and all about him was foam and spray that sparkled and glittered in the sunlight. But just then Washer wasn't much interested in things that glistened.

He saw the top of the falls ahead. Toward that he was being hurried, and the further he drifted the rougher grew the waters. His board pitched and tossed, making it difficult for the baby Raccoon to cling to it.

Washer was frightened, and in his fear he called loudly for his mother; but the roar of the falls ahead drowned his voice.

It all happened quickly, and the end came before Washer could call many times for his mother. His board was raised on the crest of a wave, and then tossed over the falls, with Washer clinging desperately to it.

Down, down, they went together, the water blinding and suffocating him. It seemed as if the falls were miles and miles high, and that he would never reach the river below. Of course, they were not as many feet high as Washer mistook for miles. But it was high enough to kill or drown most animals who went over the precipice.

It is hard to say just what saved Washer. Perhaps it was because he was tougher than most Raccoons, or because he clung

to the board and when it bobbed up to the surface it had to bring him up with it. Anyway, Washer finally got the spray out of his eyes, and found himself floating down the lower river with the falls behind him.

He had taken the dip of death, and survived it. He was out of all immediate danger. For the first time then he had eyes to admire the sparkling mist and spray rising like a million diamonds from the top and bottom of the falls.

“I must get ashore now, and dry myself,” he said to himself. “I was never so wet in all my life.”

He began paddling with his front paws, and in this way gradually directed his raft toward the shore. When he was near enough he took a flying leap and landed on a log and clung to it.

But he was in a strange country, and far from home, and he began to be afraid again. Just when he thought he would break down and cry, he heard a sniffing noise in the bushes, and looking up he found himself face to face with a big, shaggy animal, whose fierce, glaring eyes sent the shivers all through him. It was Sneaky the Wolf, who had been watching him land, and in the next story you will hear of what Sneaky did to him.

STORY TWO

WASHER IS CARRIED TO THE WOLF'S DEN

Washer felt his little heart throb at the sight of the yellow eyes watching him, and the shaggy body of Sneaky seemed bigger than that of any animal he had ever dreamed of in the North Woods. Washer gave a frenzied little squeak, and tried to hop back upon his raft; but he did not get far. Sneaky pounced down upon him, and the double row of white teeth closed upon his back and scruff of the neck.

“Oh, please—please, don’t kill me!” shrieked Washer, almost fainting from fear.

But Sneaky paid no attention to his appeal. The powerful jaws held him a prisoner. Every moment Washer expected they would close tighter and crunch his bones.

But apparently the Wolf had no idea of killing him right away. Washer, young as he was, knew that many of the wild animals of the woods teased and tortured their victims before killing them. Some of his own people had been guilty of this very cruelty. Washer, knowing now how it felt, decided that if he ever escaped he would never torture any one—no, never, not as long as he lived!

Sneaky picked him up in his mouth, and began trotting away

through the bushes, carrying Washer as easily as a cat carries its kittens. The jaws of the Wolf were closed uncomfortably tight on his neck, but after all they did not actually hurt the poor little Raccoon. The sharp, white teeth did not go through his thick fur and tough skin.

For a long time Sneaky trotted along in a mechanical lope, never once opening his mouth to speak, although Washer kept pleading with him, hoping that he would loosen his hold on his neck the minute he opened his mouth to say a word. Sneaky was too wise for that, for no Wolf can talk and still keep his mouth closed. He can growl and grumble, but not actually talk.

They passed through the thickest part of the woods, and then began climbing a rough trail among the rocks and stones. Then they came to a brook, which Sneaky crossed by jumping from stone to stone, and after that the Wolf followed a path that lead to the mouth of a cave.

When Washer saw this he opened his mouth in a series of pitiful cries, for he knew this was the entrance to the Wolf's den. He could tell this by the peculiar smell of the place. The air was filled with odors that made the baby Raccoon hold his breath.

But Sneaky was still silent and dumb. He trotted through the entrance and disappeared in the darkness of the cave. At first Washer could see nothing, but then gradually his eyes grew accustomed to the place, and his last hope vanished when he saw another Wolf almost as big as Sneaky and three little cubs playing at her feet.

“What have you here, Sneaky?” Mother Wolf growled when her lordly mate appeared.

Sneaky deposited Washer at the foot of Mother Wolf, and spoke for the first time. “A nice little dinner for you and the children,” he said. “I brought him home alive so you could show the babies how to kill. It will be great sport watching them.”

At the sound of his voice, Washer made a desperate effort to escape, but Sneaky’s paw came down on his back and held him.

“He’s a lively little Raccoon,” Sneaky remarked, grinning so his white teeth showed.

Mother Wolf looked at Washer, turned him over with a paw, and sniffed at him. Then she raised her head and looked at her mate. “He’s only a baby Raccoon,” she said. “Where’d you find the nest? And what did you do with the others? Ate them up, I suppose! That’s why you’re so generous in bringing this one home to us.”

Washer thought there was a look of disgust in the eyes and voice, and Sneaky evidently thought so, too, for he looked a little crestfallen, and then said: “No, I didn’t find his nest. He was floating down the river on a board, and when he landed I caught him.”

Mother Wolf sniffed again, and looked a little incredulous. She turned Washer over again. “He’s a mere baby,” she murmured, “not much older than our dear little ones.”

“Yes, and he’ll be sweet and tender,” added Sneaky, stretching himself. “It won’t hurt our children to eat part of him after they’ve

killed him.”

Mother Wolf did not seem anxious to kill Washer, nor was she ready to teach her little ones to kill. “We won’t kill him today,” she said finally. “My little ones are well fed, and they couldn’t eat more without hurting them. We will keep him until tomorrow.”

Sneaky was a little hurt at this remark, for he had planned to help with the feast when the others had eaten all they wanted, and he growled disconsolately: “What’ll we do with him over night? He’ll try to escape from us when we’re asleep.”

“Put him in with the children, and I’ll watch him,” replied Mother Wolf. “I never sleep with both eyes shut.”

Mother Wolf was boss of the den, for Sneaky grumblingly picked up Washer once more and carried him into the darkest corner of the cave and dropped him down among the little sleeping cubs. Their warm bodies felt good to Washer, and he crawled up close to them. He knew that he would not be killed until the next day, and he was very tired and sleepy.

Within ten minutes he was sleeping as soundly as the Wolf cubs, snuggling close up to them with his little body half buried from sight by the legs and paws of his strange bed fellows. He did not know that once or twice in the night time, Mother Wolf came over and looked down at him, with a very, very queer expression in her eyes. Each time, she walked away, grumbling to herself: “He’s only a baby—a little baby.”

It was morning before Washer opened his eyes, although it was so dark in the cave he could not tell that the sun was shining

outside. Sneaky and Mother Wolf were still sleeping, snoring away so that the den was filled with queer echoes. But if the parents were asleep, the three little Wolf cubs were wide awake. They were rolling and tumbling over each other, pulling and hauling each other's tails, and pretending to bite and scratch. Before Washer realized it he was being hugged and squeezed and jerked around as if he was a baby wolf, and not a baby Raccoon.

Of course, his first idea was to snap and bite at the cubs, but on second thought he decided, not to. If he hurt one of them Sneaky or Mother Wolf would pounce upon him and kill him in a flash. No, he had to play carefully with his bed-fellows.

They were soft, warm little bodies rolling all over him, and they never scratched or bit, but merely pretended to. Washer took care that he was as gentle, and pretty soon he was so absorbed in the play that he forgot they were his enemies.

Suddenly he looked up, and saw Mother Wolf standing over him. She had been watching him for some time. Fearful lest she had come to kill him, he doubled up in a ball and began to shake and tremble. From another corner, Sneaky yawned and came forth to look at the cubs. Mother Wolf turned to him.

"He's very playful," she said. "I don't think I'll kill him today. You must go out and get me something else to eat."

Sneaky growled his disapproval, but obeyed, and the minute he was gone Washer felt all his fear vanish. What happened in the cave next will appear in the following story.

STORY THREE

MOTHER WOLF TAKES A HAND

Washer was very lonely without his mother or brothers, and very homesick; but the little wolves were so playful they gave him little time to think of his worry. Whenever he curled up in a corner to mope and sigh, one of the cubs was sure to creep up behind and roll all over him. Sometimes they got so mixed up that it was difficult for Mother Wolf to tell her own children from the raccoon.

Meanwhile, Sneaky had been out hunting, and returned with food for his family. He flung it to the little cubs, and said:

“Eat, little ones, and may it make you strong and stout of heart like your father!”

He gave none to Washer, but Mother Wolf stepped in and divided the food evenly. “Here, Little Stranger of the woods, you must eat too, or you’ll grow thin and die.”

Sneaky did not like this, and displayed his sharp, cruel teeth. “Why should a stranger rob my children of their food?” he asked. “I do not hunt for another’s brat.”

“If he doesn’t eat,” replied Mother Wolf, smiling, “How can he grow fat? Our children must have their food rich and juicy.”

Sneaky grinned at this retort, for it was quite true that all wolves liked fat little animals. It made the meat so much more

delicious. He was content to hunt food for Washer if it fattened him up for the cubs.

Every day when he returned to his den, he would ask: "Isn't the Little Stranger fat enough to kill today?"

And always Mother Wolf would reply: "Not today. We must wait another day."

Of course, all this conversation worried and frightened Washer, for he knew that in a short time he would be killed to make food for his playmates. It sickened and terrified him so that he finally decided to make the effort to escape from the cave. He had been so gentle, and appeared so contented, that he was given more liberty each day. When the cubs played in front of the cave, Washer was permitted to go there with them.

This gave him an idea. One day when Sneaky was away in the woods hunting, and Mother Wolf was sleeping in front of the cave, Washer suggested to the cubs that they play hide and seek in the bushes. This was great sport, and they began scampering around behind the bushes to hide.

When it came Washer's turn to hide, he ran further away from the mouth of the cave than at any time before. He looked around him, and saw that a deep ravine was just beyond his hiding place.

"Now is my chance," he said to himself. "If I can escape into that ravine, they'll never catch me. I can hide until night, and then journey far into the woods."

He had no sooner decided upon this than he began scampering for the edge of the ravine. If he once reached the edge of the

cliff, he could roll down it, and then hide at the bottom until dark.

He could hear the cubs calling him, but he paid no attention to them. Liberty was ahead, and he ran with all his might. His legs were short and weak, and he could not make as good time as he wished. He stumbled once or twice and rolled over and over. But he was on his feet again, running for dear life, before you could count ten.

Tired and panting, he finally reached the edge of the ravine. When he looked down it, he was a little frightened. It was terribly steep and the bottom a long way off.

"I wonder if it will hurt me," he murmured aloud. "I might run around it, and not fall in it."

Just when he had made up his mind to do this there was a noise in the bushes behind him, and through the air came Mother Wolf, loping along at a tremendous speed. Washer ducked his head, and tried to hide, but Mother Wolf had seen him. A big paw came down on his back and flattened him to the earth.

"Where are you going, Little Stranger?" the Wolf asked. "Why are you running away from us?"

Now Washer's first thought was to deny that he was running away, but he knew that it was useless to try to deceive Mother Wolf. He realized now that she had been watching him out of the corners of her eyes all the time. She had not been asleep at all. So Washer decided to tell the truth.

"I didn't want to be killed," he said. "I'm growing fatter every day, and soon you will kill me for your children. O Mother Wolf,

do you know how it feels to be killed?"

"No, I don't suppose I do," was the reply. "I've never been killed."

"Then let me tell you it's worse than anything you can dream of," panted Washer.

"How do you know, Little Stranger?" Mother Wolf smiled as she asked this. "You've never been killed."

"No, but can't you imagine how it would feel?"

"Imagine! What is that? I never heard of such a thing."

"Why—imagination is something that helps you to feel just as if the real thing was happening."

Mother Wolf released Washer and let him sit up again. She squatted down before him and looked into his eyes.

"I don't believe wolves have what you call imagination," she replied. "No, I'm sure they don't. Tell me more what it means."

Washer was a very young little Raccoon to be instructing a full-grown wolf, but all of his family had been born with imagination. He could remember how he and his brothers had often listened to the storms raging through the woods and had tried to imagine how it would feel without any home to protect them. They had shuddered at the thought and crept closer together in their nest. But it was very difficult to tell in words just what imagination was.

"Why, there isn't much more to tell," he replied hesitatingly. "It's something you have to feel. Have you ever been hurt, Mother Wolf?"

“Yes, I burnt my front paw once in a fire that campers had left in the woods.”

“And it hurt terribly, didn’t it?”

Mother Wolf winced and nodded.

“Then,” added Washer triumphantly, “if you can feel it now you have imagination. You don’t really feel it now, but you imagine how it felt.”

“Yes,” replied Mother Wolf, “but that’s something I did feel once. But I was never killed. So how can I imagine how it would feel to be killed?”

“Just think of your burnt foot, and then think of being burnt all over. You would know then how it would feel to be killed. Oh, it’s terrible!”

Mother Wolf was quiet for a long time, and then she looked not unkindly at Washer. “Was that why you were running away?” she asked finally.

“Yes, I didn’t want to be killed.”

“Then listen, Little Stranger,” she said. “You’re not going to be killed. I’m going to keep you to play with my little ones, and to teach them things that no wolf can teach them. I will adopt you, and make you one of my own children. No harm will ever come to you. Now come back home with me.”

Washer’s heart gave a great bound of relief, and he licked the paw near him. He trotted back to the den by the side of Mother Wolf happy and contented; but in the next story you will hear what Sneaky thought of this new arrangement.

STORY FOUR

MOTHER WOLF

SAVES WASHER'S LIFE

Sneaky came home early that day, bringing with him a good size fox which he displayed to his young cubs with much satisfaction. Licking his chops and puffing out his cheeks with pride, he said:

“See what a great hunter I am! Nothing escapes me! I risk my life for your sakes, and you must learn to be as good hunters when you grow up.”

Mother Wolf smiled a little queerly at the boast of her mate, and when he was through she asked:

“Did you have to risk your life to catch Mr. Fox?”

Sneaky turned and looked a little sheepish, and answered in a voice of wounded pride: “Yes, I nearly slipped off the rock into the water trying to bring him down. It was a great jump I made. It must have been nearly as long as the river is wide.”

“I know you’re a great jumper,” replied Mother Wolf, still smiling. “The greatest jump I ever saw you make was when Loup the Lynx pursued you in the timber below the falls.”

Now reference to this adventure always angered Sneaky, for he had not come out of it with much glory. He had quarreled with Loup over a prize, and in the end they had snarled and snapped at

each other like two wild cats. Finally, Loup had lost his temper and sprang at Sneaky's throat, who avoided it by a hair's breadth, and if there hadn't been a wide chasm near the wolf might have lost his life. With a tremendous spring he had cleared the chasm where he could defy the Lynx at a safe distance.

"My dear," Sneaky began, scowling at his mate, "I took that jump just to show Loup what I could do. If he had followed me, I surely would have killed him."

Mother Wolf laughed and cuddled up to one of her little ones. "I know, Sneaky, you're very brave," she said.

That was all, but the way she said it angered Sneaky. It was just as if she had said, "Oh, yes, you're very brave when there's no danger around."

Sneaky switched his tail angrily, and bared his white teeth. Just then he might have done something courageous if there had been a chance, for he was very sore and disturbed that Mother Wolf should speak of his bravery in such a flippant way before his children.

Suddenly he caught sight of Washer, who had been looking and listening in silence. His eyes gleamed with a yellow light.

"Ah!" he said, stretching out a paw and grasping Washer. "Our Little Stranger is very fat. I think now I'll kill him. Yes, he's very fat," he added, as he felt of Washer's ribs.

Washer was so startled and frightened by this sudden attack that he began squealing and panting for breath. But the louder he cried the more it pleased Sneaky. The heavy paw pressing down

upon his back threatened to break his spine.

Mother Wolf suddenly sprang to Washer's rescue. Her own eyes showed baleful yellow, and her teeth, fully as white and long as Sneaky's, were bared to the gums.

"Take your paw off!" she said sharply. "How dare you act like that? If you touch one of my children again you'll go forth to hunt and never return."

"One of your children!" exclaimed Sneaky. "You call this little brat one of your children!"

"Yes, I have adopted him, and I shall raise him to hunt with the pack. You cannot hurt him!"

Sneaky was too surprised at first to speak, but after a long pause he recovered and laid his head back on his shoulders while a most startling yowl escaped from his throat. It was such a blood-curdling yelp that Washer cringed and cowered in fear. But it was not a battle cry; it was simply Sneaky's way of expressing his merriment. Mother Wolf watched him in silence until he stopped.

"I cannot hurt him!" Sneaky repeated. "My dear, you forget he belongs to me. I caught him, and to me he belongs. Isn't that the law of the pack? Who shall deny me what belongs to me?"

"You forget another law of the pack," snapped Mother Wolf. "Half of the hunt belongs to me and the children. Isn't that the law?"

"Oh, yes, so it is," smiled Sneaky. "Half belongs to my family, and I shall divide with them. Which half do you want, my dear?"

There was a sinister look in the yellow eyes. Mother Wolf read his intentions, and so did Washer. Sneaky intended to divide the Raccoon in two equal halves. How could he do that without killing him?

Mother Wolf seemed puzzled for an instant, for she could not break the law of the pack, not even to save Washer from death. But an idea came to her finally, and the light of hope returned to her eyes.

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