

Otis James

The Club at Crow's Corner



James Otis

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CHAPTER I

MR. CROW AND MR. TURTLE

Over in that portion of the big woods where the brook swings around a clump of alders in order to wind in and out among the trees is a very large and very old oak tree whose branches afford a roosting place for all the feathered inhabitants of that vicinity, and give shade on warm days to all who are forced to wear fur coats during the summer.

This oak tree stands near what might be called a "corner" of the brook, and because old Mr. James Crow is to be found among its branches every moment of the day or night except when out in search of food, the oak tree, the bend of the brook, and the land in that immediate neighborhood have come to be known as "Crow's Corner," so Mr. Bunny Rabbit declares, and there is no reason to doubt his word.

Mr. Bunny is a very old fellow. He never had any tail to speak of, and in his younger days 'Squire Owl, whose wife and little ones were in need of rabbit stew, decided to take Mr. Bunny home with him; but the old fellow, who was very spry during the earlier portion of his life, jumped into a thicket of thorn bushes so nimbly that the 'Squire only succeeded in nipping about half an inch off poor Bunny's apology for a tail. One of the old fellow's ears has been split into two pieces by an over-eager hawk, and he has a great scar on his left side where Mr. Reynard Fox snapped at him, but failed to get more than a small mouthful after all.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Bunny has so many scars which tell of hairbreadth escapes, and has been forced to run so many times for very life, that no mistake can be made in setting him down as an old fellow of vast experience, who could tell many an entertaining story of his own adventures; and because he is ready and willing to talk at almost any time to a friendly listener, I came to know about the Fur and Feather Club, whose meeting place is at Crow's Corner.

Mr. Bunny is free to admit that Mr. James Crow is older than himself and has seen very much more of the world than ever did any single member of the Rabbit family, because of the ease with which he can travel; but at the same time he declares, with many a sigh and groan because of the wickedness of this world, that Mr. Crow often tells stories in which is no truth whatever, and this he does in order to make it appear that he is a bird of considerable importance in any neighborhood where he may chance to be.

How the club at Crow's Corner was started Mr. Bunny cannot say. He himself came upon it by mistake, while he was scurrying here and there under every friendly bush and leaf in order to refuse an invitation to dinner which 'Squire Owl was very eager he should accept, and when he arrived at that particular place in the big woods Mr. Crow was telling Cheeko Squirrel and two or three members of his family about the wickedness of Mr. Weasel, who had just killed all Mrs. Thrush's children.

'Squire Owl put an end to the meeting at that time, for Master Cheeko and his little ones believed it necessary they should get under cover in the shortest possible space of time; but when Mr. Bunny had more leisure he went back to Crow's Corner and was speedily made a member of the club.

"We don't have any regular hours for meeting," Mr. Bunny said while first telling about the association. "When 'Squire Owl or Professor Hawk have had such a big dinner that they forget to be hungry, we get together around the tree, those of us who belong to the fur section, with the associates of the feather department on the branches, and then it is that you might hear some rare stories if you happened along that way."

At that moment Mr. Bunny suddenly dropped his ears over his eyes and began to laugh heartily, whereupon, as a matter of course, it seemed proper to ask what had caused his mirth.

"I just happened to think of a rare trick Cheeko Squirrel played on Mr. Crow not long ago, and there was a good deal of talk about expelling him from the club; but everybody except Mr. Crow himself thought it was so funny that they didn't have the heart to turn Cheeko out, for he means well, as a general thing, even though he does spend the most of his time scolding somebody or something.

"You see Cheeko had the idea that it was his duty to get square with Mr. Crow because the old fellow gave him a downright talking to before all the members of the club on account of his chattering so much while the speeches were being made. It really wasn't to be wondered at that Mr. Crow called him to order, for you know what a disturbance he makes over nothing; but Cheeko thought he was abused, and didn't get more than half the sleep he needed, on account of lying awake nights to figure out how he could get the best of poor old Jimmy Crow.

"Well, one day while he was down near the pond where the Geese family spend so much of their time dabbling around in the water in the most foolish way you can imagine, Cheeko hit upon what he thought was a great plan; but it turned out to be a very serious matter, or might have been if 'Squire Owl hadn't interfered.

"Down at the pond lives an old fellow by the name of Slowly Turtle, and between you and me, I don't think he has very much sense, although you can't really say he is foolish. I suppose it takes him so long to go from one place to another that he gets himself all mixed up with watching out to see if he is moving. He isn't the kind of fellow you'd really want for a friend; but because he doesn't do any great harm in the world, we members of the club pass the time of day with him when we meet.

"Well, at this time I'm going to tell you about, Cheeko Squirrel happened to go down to the pond just out of curiosity, and there he saw old Slowly, lying on a rock sunning himself.

"'Howdy, Mr. Turtle,' Cheeko said friendly-like, and the old fellow, being too lazy to speak, winked one eye at Mr. Squirrel.

"'Have you had your dinner yet?' Cheeko asked, as if it would make him feel dreadfully bad to know that Mr. Turtle was hungry.

"'I haven't had time to go after it, and it's so near sunset now that I'm afraid I'll have to wait till to-morrow.'

"'Why don't you catch a big, fat frog?' Cheeko asked as if he couldn't rest easy until he knew that Mr. Turtle was comfortable.

"'I haven't seen any around here lately, and there isn't time to go hunting to-day.'

"'I don't suppose you'd be willing to follow any plan of mine,' Mr. Squirrel said, speaking soft as silk; 'but if you did, I'm almost certain I could put you in a place where all you'd have to do would be to open your mouth when you wanted a bite.'

"That pleased Mr. Turtle 'way down to the ground, and he agreed he'd do whatever Mr. Squirrel said, providing he didn't have to walk too far, so Cheeko set about the plan he'd figured out in his mind for getting square with Mr. Crow. In the first place he daubed Mr. Turtle all over with clay till he looked like a ball of mud, and while doing this he told the old fellow how to act.

"'I'm going to carry you over into the woods a little way and you are to keep as still as a mouse till you feel some one meddling with the mud I'm sticking to your shell. Then you'll know it's time to get your dinner, and all you'll have to do will be to shut your jaws on whatever is within reach. I'll promise that you shall have meat that will be sweeter than the fattest frog you ever heard croak.'

"Mr. Turtle let Cheeko do what he pleased, and if you'll believe it, that squirrel rolled the old fellow in his covering of clay all the way from the pond up to Crow's Corner. It must have been a terrible job, but Cheeko was willing to do it for the sake of getting a joke on Mr. Crow, and when he came to the foot of the tree he sat down in front of what appeared to be nothing more than a clay ball, with his tail spread out over his head as if he were thinking mighty serious. It wasn't long before old Mr. Crow espied him and it really did seem as if that bird would shake himself into little pieces, he

was so curious to know what Cheeko was doing. He sat on the very tip of one of the branches, looking at the odd thing until he could keep still no longer, and then he hopped down by the side of Cheeko.

"What have you got with you, Mr. Squirrel?" he asked, trying to turn the clay ball over, and Cheeko said careless-like, as if it didn't make very much difference to him whether Mr. Crow got the information he wanted:

"Roll it over two or three times and you may know as much as I do about it."

"Mr. Crow twisted his head first on one side and then on the other until he had looked at the clay ball with both eyes, but Mr. Squirrel didn't offer to explain anything more, and finally he grew so excited that it seemed as if he just really had to do as Cheeko wanted. He rolled the funny looking thing to and fro without learning anything regarding it, and then began pecking at the hole in one end which Mr. Squirrel had left open so Mr. Turtle could get air.

"By this time poor old Mr. Turtle made up his slow mind that the meat Cheeko told him about was near at hand, and before Mr. Crow could wink an eye, out came a queer-looking head with jaws that fastened on the bird's leg in a way that wasn't pleasant or comfortable.

"There's no need of my saying that Mr. Crow was frightened. The idea of being bitten by a lump of clay nearly scared him white, and up into the tree he flew caw-cawing at the full strength of his lungs, while Mr. Turtle hung on the best he knew how, for it must have startled him a good bit to feel that instead of getting a dinner he was going up into the air like a balloon. Of course, old Slowly couldn't make any noise; but Mr. Crow was doing that for both of them, and down at the foot of the tree Cheeko sat laughing until, so Mr. Porcupine declares, it seemed certain he would burst.

"Just then 'Squire Owl, who had been awakened by the disturbance, came out to learn what the matter was, but Mr. Crow was so frightened that he couldn't give him the least little bit of information, and the 'Squire had to find out for himself. Being near-sighted in the daytime, it was quite a while before he saw Mr. Turtle's head, and then he cried out angrily:

"What are you doing up a tree, you rascal? Let go of Mr. Crow's leg, and go back to your pond this instant."

"If I do that I shall break myself all to pieces," Mr. Turtle said, speaking rather indistinctly because his mouth was so full; and, hearing the words, Mr. Squirrel laughed harder than ever, until the 'Squire began to get an idea of how it all happened.

"This is some of your doings, Cheeko Squirrel," he said, savagely. "Call off your turtle, or I'll come down there and eat you without butter."

"You've tried to do that a good many times, and I've always got the best of you, even when it wasn't very light, so don't puff yourself up with the idea that I'm afraid of a big bunch of feathers like you while the sun is shining," Cheeko said, shaking his tail till Mr. Porcupine says he was afraid it would drop off.

"Of course the 'Squire was dreadfully angry because of Cheeko's impudence, and down he came out of the tree without stopping to think how blind he was, while Mr. Crow shouted:

"Never mind that miserable squirrel, 'Squire; but take this terrible thing off my leg," and Mr. Turtle mumbled as well as he could without opening his jaws:

"I'm the one who should be helped, for I can't afford to fall out of a tree at my time of life."

"All the while 'Squire Owl blundered around, not able to see even his own nose, and Cheeko Squirrel jumped around him laughing and shouting till every bird in the woods flew over to the Corner to find out what was happening."

CHAPTER II

CHEEKO IN DANGER

Mr. Bunny had paused in the midst of his story to laugh at the comical situation as described by himself, with Mr. Turtle clinging for dear life to Mr. Crow's leg, and the old bird screaming at the full strength of his lungs for help, while 'Squire Owl darted here and there blindly, growing more and more angry as Cheeko Squirrel continued to say disagreeable things.

"You see what made it altogether too funny was the way the 'Squire raved because he couldn't find Cheeko," Bunny continued as he wiped away with his ears the tears which had been caused by mirth. "If Cheeko only had a bit more sense, he wouldn't have carried on quite so bad, for he must have realized that the 'Squire would lay it up against him; but all he thought of at the time was the fun, and the way he talked to that old bird was something dreadful.

"Now you must remember that Mr. Crow didn't hold his tongue all this time, but kept on shouting for help until you would have thought he was afraid of his life, and we couldn't hear very much of what Mr. Turtle was trying to say. Cheeko didn't have time to pay attention to any one except 'Squire Owl, and danced from one branch to another screaming and chattering until, suddenly, down darted Professor Hawk with his mouth wide open.

"Oh me, oh my, how that squirrel did hustle! If the Professor had once got a grip on him, it was good-bye Cheeko, and nobody knew that better than Master Cheeko himself. He gave one leap for a lot of thorn bushes which grew near the old oak tree as if somebody had put them there for the especial benefit of us members of the fur section, and it seemed to me as if he alighted a good fifty feet from where he started. He must have torn his coat in more than one place, for when a fellow jumps like that he can't pick out just the right spot for stopping, as I know to my sorrow when I've been trying to give Mr. Fox the slip.

"Of course, Professor Hawk didn't stand any chance of getting at him once he was among the thorns, and he would have sailed off in a huff, but that the 'Squire shouted for him to stop. Then he came back to the angry old owl, and the two whispered together a long time without paying the least little bit of attention to poor Jimmy Crow. I knew the big fellows were hatching up some kind of plan to get the best of Cheeko, and at the first good chance I told him the wisest course for him was to get as far from Crow's Corner as his legs would carry him between then and sunset.

"It isn't of very much use to give Cheeko advice, for he always thinks he knows better than any one else, and this time, instead of thanking me for taking the trouble to find him among all those thorns, he said as pertly as any sparrow you ever heard:

"I want you to understand, Bunny Rabbit, that I'm not afraid of those two old fogies – no, nor of all their families. I've taken care of myself in these woods a good many years, and I'm not to be scared by an old owl now'

"'It's better to be scared than eaten, Cheeko,' I said as I rubbed two or three spots of blood from his coat, for it was in a shocking condition by this time. 'You can't stay here among the thorns very long, because Mr. Weasel is sure to hear all this row, and once he gets on your trail you're a gone squirrel.'

"'He tried to run me down last fall; but I gave him the slip all right,' Cheeko said quickly, puffing his chest way out because he was mighty proud of escaping from the bloodthirsty Mr. Weasel.

"'It isn't likely that a squirrel could get away more than once after Mr. Weasel had started for him,' I said, just a bit provoked because Cheeko Squirrel thought himself so smart, and then I left him all swelled up with pride, getting out from the bushes as Mr. Blue Jay came along screaming with anger on account of the hubbub in the club quarters where everything is usually conducted in the most seemly manner.

"Mr. Jay is a wise bird, and you can make a note of that. Just as soon as he saw that clay ball hanging to Mr. Crow's leg and understood what was beneath all the mud, he knew exactly how to fix things; but it was quite a while before he could make Mr. Crow and Mr. Turtle hear him, which is saying a good deal when you come to understand what a loud voice he has. After a while, however, he succeeded in making old Jimmy hold his peace and then he said, as if he were the president of the club instead of only a small-sized member:

"You can't expect Mr. Turtle to tumble out of the tree just to please you, James Crow, for he would break himself to pieces and besides, if what Cock Robin tells me is true, he didn't come up here of his own free will."

"I'm not saying he did," Mr. Crow snapped out short as pie crust. "He took hold of my leg and I couldn't get here without him, and that's why the miserable creature is making so much trouble."

"I'm not doing a thing," Mr. Turtle said, speaking as if the tears were just ready to run down his muddy cheeks. "I'm too old to be tumbling around like a jumping-jack and if anybody is making trouble it's this wretched crow, who has put on more airs than a peacock since the club was started."

"How did he get hold of Crow's leg in the first place?" Mr. Jay asked as if he were a regular judge, and had a right to pry into other people's business.

"Then poor old Slowly told the whole story, while Cheeko snickered and screamed from his hiding place among the thorns, and, after Mr. Jay had studied the whole thing over, he said, bristling up the feathers on his head, 'There's only one fair thing for you to do, James Crow: Take old Slowly back to the shore of the pond and then he'll let go of your leg.'"

"But how will I get all this mud off my shell?" Mr. Turtle asked, speaking quite distinctly for a fellow who had his mouth full of crow's leg.

"Soak yourself till it comes off," Mr. Jay said with a laugh, and the president of the club asked, as if he were in a good deal of pain:

"Will you open your mouth if I carry you back to the pond? It's going to be a dreadful job to fly such a distance with you hanging there; but I'm willing to make the try if you'll agree that what Mr. Jay has said will be the square thing."

"Of course Mr. Turtle promised, for what else could he do while he was up a tree so far, and all the members of the club who had come to learn what was going on got out of the way to give Mr. Crow a fair chance. It was a good deal like work to fly while his leg was being pulled so badly; but he contrived to do it and, after watching until he settled down at the edge of the pond, I began to look around for Cheeko Squirrel.

"Squire Owl and Professor Hawk had gone away, telling Mr. Porcupine they were off for a picnic; but that didn't seem reasonable to me, for the pair were not such very warm friends as all that, and I knew there was trouble in store for Cheeko if he didn't watch out a good deal sharper than I ever knew of his doing.

"I just wish you could have seen that squirrel when I found him sitting at the front door of Sonny Hedgehog's hole, ready to get under cover at the first sign of danger! Do you know, he really believed he had tired out the 'Squire and that there wasn't any danger he could come to harm!"

"You won't find me in a pickle, no matter how long you hunt," he said, shaking his tail till it really made me seasick. "I'd like to see the owl, or the hawk, for that matter, that I couldn't fool when I laid myself right out to do the job. They've run things their own way so long around here that they think everybody else must get off the earth when they say the word. I'll show 'em what an up-to-date squirrel can do."

"You'll be showing nothing mighty soon, Cheeko, if you don't take a tumble to yourself," I said, and I couldn't help speaking a bit short, for it provoked me terribly to see him throwing out his chest as if he were second cousin to Senator Bear. "You're letting the 'Squire and Professor Hawk shut your eye, that's what's the matter! I'm telling you that those two have had their heads together to your harm, and you'll soon know what they were talking about if you keep the idea in your head that

you're the biggest little animal in the woods. Take my advice and get away from Crow's Corner for a while. There are some nice ears of corn over on Mr. Man's place now and it would be a pleasant little vacation to go there for a few days until this matter simmers down a bit.'

""Do you suppose I'm going to let those old birds think I'm afraid of them?" Cheeko asked, bold as brass, and it was no use for me to try to keep my temper within bounds any longer.

""Of course you're afraid of them!" I cried. 'It only proves that you've fallen in love with yourself, when you talk like that, and I'm not going to waste any more time on you.'

""Nobody asked you for your time, you long-eared, bob-tailed old fraud!" Cheeko said, swinging his tail in the most impudent manner imaginable, and I hopped off, determined that I'd never raise a paw in his behalf, no matter how much trouble he might be in; but, of course, when it seemed certain he'd be made over into a pie, as I'm going to tell you about, I quite forgot that he had insulted me when I was trying to do him a favor.

"I left him at the door of Sonny Hedgehog's home and went down toward the pond to see what luck poor old Slowly had in scraping the mud off his shell; but before reaching there whom should I come across but the 'Squire and the Professor hunting for nuts. Now you know as well as I do that there isn't a member of either the Owl or the Hawk family who has a hankering for nuts. Of course there was some mischief in the wind and I had a pretty good idea that Cheeko was the particular nut they were looking for, so I hid behind a lot of ferns till I'd got at the root of their scheme.

"It was too early in the season to find nuts on the ground; but they didn't come to realize that until after searching around among the leaves a long while and then the Professor flew into the top of the walnut tree, where he nipped off two or three. Then he came down to where the 'Squire was waiting for him and said with a chuckle:

""Just as soon as that fool crow gets back, all the members of the club will gather near the oak tree to hear what he has to say about the mix-up with Slowly Turtle. Of course Cheeko will be there too, for there is nothing going on around these woods that he doesn't try to have a paw in. We'll put the nuts where he'll see them, and you shall get in the shade where the sun won't hurt your eyes. Then, if he isn't your meat, I'll agree to furnish the dinners to-morrow.'

"The idea of two big bullies taking so much time to get the best of one little squirrel! I forgot all about Cheeko's impudence to me and, instead of looking after old Mr. Turtle, I scuttled back through the bushes to watch the villains while they laid their trap."

CHAPTER III

BUNNY RABBIT'S EFFORTS

Mr. Bunny Rabbit hopped up on a fallen tree where he could the better be seen while telling his story, and where, also, he might have eyes and ears on the alert for danger. A cautious old fellow is Bunny, else he would not be alive this day, for among the wood folk there is more than one who has a fondness for rabbit pie or stew, and that member of the Rabbit family who lives to have children of his own has given good proof that he keeps his wits about him the greater portion of the time.

"I was telling you about Cheeko's foolishness, and how nearly it cost him his life," Mr. Bunny said after a pause so long that it really seemed, for the time, as if he had forgotten the story.

"Of course, old Mr. Crow flew back to the oak tree as soon as Slowly Turtle had let go of his leg, and, oh me! oh my! how he did scold about Mr. Turtle, never once seeming to think that Cheeko Squirrel had anything to do with the matter. Nearly every member of the club pretended to believe that Slowly was the only one who should be blamed, although they knew that Cheeko is a master hand at making mischief; but it so happened that he wasn't there to make trouble, and the result was that the president of the club had everything his own way.

"It was voted that Mr. Turtle should never be made welcome at Crow's Corner; that he had behaved in an unseemly manner, and ought to be shunned by every member of the club. This matter had no more than been settled when we heard Master Squirrel screaming and chattering as if he were the only real thing in the woods, and as his voice sounded nearer and nearer, telling that he was coming to join the company, I looked around to see what had become of the Professor and the 'Squire.

"If you'll believe it, they were nowhere to be seen, and I'm such a silly thing, sometimes, that I really believed they had given up the scheme I saw them working on. Then I got interested in what Mr. Crow was saying, for he started in the best he knew how to have all the members of the club vote that Slowly Turtle and his entire family should be turned out of the pond, and never allowed to come near it again.

"Cocky Robin wanted to know who'd do the 'turning out,' and how it was to be done, but the old man Crow was so angry he wouldn't go into that part of the business at all, and claimed that after the vote had been taken it would be time enough to settle what he called the 'minor points.'

"Just then up came Cheeko, his tail spread over his head and waving to and fro in that way which always makes me feel seasick. It doesn't seem possible, as I tell it to you now, but it is a fact that, not content with having been the means of giving Mr. Crow the sorest leg you ever saw on a bird, he must needs begin to brag about what he had done in the way of making trouble in the club.

"Then Mr. Jay, who had been roosting in the very top of the tree with his crest sticking straight up because of what he had done toward straightening out matters, lost his temper, and began giving Cheeko about as severe a lecture as ever any squirrel listened to, but all the while the foolish mischief-maker chattered and screamed as if he were the whole show.

"I had forgotten entirely about the 'Squire and Professor Hawk, until I saw Cheeko running along the ground toward where three or four walnuts were lying near a clump of fir bushes, and then I got right up on my hind legs and shouted to him that he'd best keep under cover if he wanted to save his skin.

"Take care of yourself, if you can, you bob-tailed old fraud, and I'll show that a fellow about my size is able to do pretty much as he pleases in these woods.'

"Of course, every member of the club was looking at Cheeko by this time and I'll venture to say there was not one present who didn't think he was making a fool of himself by talking in such a strain, for there are precious few of us wood folk who can do as they please all the time.

"Well, Master Cheeko skipped toward the nuts, shaking his tail to show that he was a terribly brave fellow, and if 'Squire hadn't been quite so blind it would have been the last tail-shake for that squirrel. You must know that the 'Squire was hiding among the fir bushes in front of which the nuts had been laid and somewhere among the small branches was the Professor watching out to take a hand in the plan in case the first part of it missed; but, of course, we didn't know all that at the time.

"Cheeko was so eager to show the members of the club that he had no reason to be afraid of anything wearing feathers or fur that he didn't look to the right or to the left, but made straight for the nuts, and, just as he was about to pick up one, out sailed the 'Squire with a rush and a bang, which showed how angry he was.

"Now the Professor had laid the nuts in the shade of the fir bushes, so they would be sheltered from the sunlight, but yet it was considerably lighter there than in the thicket; consequently the instant the 'Squire popped his head out he had to shut his eyes, of course, so by the time he struck the ground Cheeko had jumped aside.

"If the foolish squirrel had been satisfied with thus giving 'Squire Owl the slip, he might have boasted for many a day about going straight into the old fellow's trap and coming out again without a scratch; but he must needs scream and laugh as if it were something very funny, and then Professor Hawk came into the game. Down he flew, aiming straight for Cheeko, and, with never a care as to how brightly the sun might shine, for there's nothing the matter with his eyes, and then was the time when I believed Master Cheeko was down and out for good. And so he would have been but for Mr. Crow, who, forgetting the trick Cheeko had played on him, dropped down from the top of the old oak more quickly than I ever saw a bird move before, fluttering his wings directly under the Professor's beak just as he was on the point of snapping up a fat squirrel, who would have delighted the stomachs of the little Hawks.

"Even though Mr. Crow moved so swiftly, it was the narrowest kind of squeak for Cheeko. The Professor's claws struck his back, cutting through his coat in three or four places, and he received such a blow that it was quite as much as he could do to scramble among the raspberry bushes, which, fortunately, grew near at hand. He didn't have his tail over his head then, and that's a fact; but he was about as discouraged an animal as you ever saw. How that old owl did rave and scold when he found that Cheeko had got off alive! He accused every member of the club with having had a paw or a wing in his defeat, and threatened with many a needless word to pay us off even though he had to spend every minute of his time for the next month.

"The Professor didn't say anything; but flew up on Mr. Crow's perch, looking sour as vinegar, and I said to myself then that he was the one we had the most reason to fear. You could tell by the look in his eye that he was already thinking up some wicked plan, and I really had palpitation of the heart because of imagining what he might be able to do if he set himself right down to getting revenge.

"If you'll believe it, I didn't dare stay at the foot of the tree where I could see the evil glare in his eyes, even though I was snug among the thorn bushes; but hopped off through the underbrush, taking mighty good care not to show myself in the open for a single minute, until I found poor Cheeko, who looked as if all he needed in this world was a deep, deep hole where he could die in peace.

"Have you found out that you can't do pretty much as you please, Cheeko?" I asked, and he answered with a groan:

"I suppose you think it is funny to talk that way when a fellow is dying,' and he tried to swing his tail a bit, but couldn't move a single hair. I can't begin to tell how badly off he was.

"Of course I couldn't help pitying him, even though he had called me a bob-tailed fraud, and after doing my best to show him that the animal, or the bird, for that matter, who boasts of what he can do, and sticks his nose into danger simply to show that he isn't afraid, is the silliest thing alive, I promised to have Mrs. Bunny fix him up the same kind of herb tea she always makes for me when I've been handled roughly by some of the wood bullies.

"He declared he couldn't get into his own house, and that even though it was possible for him to move about as lively as before the Professor hit him, he wouldn't dare go up a tree for at least two weeks, all of which showed that he realized how foolish he had been. I hunted around until I found snug quarters under the roots of an old pine, and helped him move in; but I tell you the tears came to his eyes more than once before he settled down, for his back was so sore that the least movement caused him pain. Then I started for home, little dreaming that by trying to help Cheeko I was at the same time laying a trap for my own little Sonny Bunny, which, as you shall see, I found out that I really was doing.

"Cheeko made me agree to come back as soon as possible, and, remembering that I had promised my wife some nice fresh lettuce from Mr. Man's garden that night for supper, I agreed with him that if I didn't get my chores done up early, I'd send Sonny Bunny with the herb tea.

"Now it seems that some of the neighbors had told my wife of all that happened at the club, and she was nearly frightened out of her wits because I had stayed away so long. When I told her of my promise to Cheeko, she said flatly that she wouldn't lift a paw to help an idle fellow who was always finding fault with everybody instead of getting in his winter's supply of nuts; but after hearing how badly off he was, she took it all back and set about making the herb tea.

"If I don't get back by the time it is done, send Sonny Bunny over with some of it, and tell the little fellow to stay with Cheeko till I get there,' I said to my wife, for if anything could cheer an invalid it would be the funny capers of an innocent little rabbit like my youngest. I only wish there was time for me to tell you of all his bright doings; you should see him dancing in the swamp when the moon shines brightly, and then if you didn't say he was the cutest baby who ever wore a fur coat, it would be because you are not a judge of children.

"Well, I started off for Mr. Man's garden, taking good care to keep out of sight even though it was too late for the Professor's family to be out, and too early for either the Weasels or the Owls, and never so much as dreaming I had almost sent poor little Sonny Bunny to his death.

"I knew exactly where to find the best lettuce, and got all I wanted without being seen by Mr. Man or that meddling son of his. Then, instead of going home in a hurry, I loitered here or there to get young carrots, or a few heads of clover, thinking I would make of the dinner a regular feast.

"It was a full hour after sunset when I went into the house with such a supply of good things as would have surprised Mrs. Rabbit if she hadn't been so sorely worried about Sonny Bunny.

"I sent him off with the herb tea very soon after you left, cautioning him to hop back before it was time for Mr. Weasel to come out, and he hasn't shown his ears here yet. You must go after him at once, Bunny, and don't let Cheeko persuade you to stay a single minute, for I am too nervous to be left alone."

At this point Mr. Rabbit's story was interrupted by the appearance of his wife, who, half hidden amid the ferns, beckoned him to her side.

"Stay where you are, and I'll be right back," he said in a whisper. "Don't move about too much, for she is very timid, especially since Mr. Man's boy Tommy set his dog to chase her."

Then he hopped away, and what could a body do but wait until he should be at liberty to finish the story?

CHAPTER IV

SONNY BUNNY'S PERIL

It was possible to see Mr. Bunny Rabbit talking earnestly with his wife amid the ferns for five minutes or more, and then he came back to the old log, curling his whiskers and otherwise appearing to be well satisfied with the world in general and himself in particular.

"My wife is such a nervous thing since Mr. Man's boy Tommy set his dog on her," he said, hopping up on the log that he might the better be seen. "Now she has got it in her head that Mr. Weasel has found his way to our home, and ran all this distance up here to warn me about being careful when I came to supper. She's old enough to know that I'm keeping my eye out for that murdering villain, and the first time I heard of his coming around where we live I'd move.

"I suppose it seems kind of queer to you that all us wood folk are so afraid of Mr. Weasel; but if you were to see him out on one of his killings, you'd understand it very readily. It would seem just a little bit different if he picked us small people up for dinner or breakfast; but he does nothing of the kind. He commits murder just to please his wicked self, and oftentimes doesn't stop to suck a single drop of blood from his victim. A desperately wicked old fellow is Mr. Weasel, and even the 'Squire and the Professor are afraid of him.

"Yes, yes, I'm going to tell you how much trouble I got poor little Sonny Bunny into, through trying to help Cheeko Squirrel after he had so needlessly poked his nose into danger. I couldn't help saying just a word about that miserable weasel, because of all the fright my wife had on his account, and now for the story I began so long ago:

"You'll remember that my wife sent the poor little fellow to Cheeko with some herb tea, and when I got back with the things for dinner she was terribly worried because he hadn't come home. I'm willing to confess that I didn't feel really easy in mind myself, for he was too young to be out in the woods alone after dark, never having been taught to take care of himself in the night, and off I scuttled the best I knew how, which wasn't slow; but trying to make myself believe that Sonny stayed to cheer Cheeko.

"I was hopping along mighty fast when whom should I see just ahead of me on the path but Mr. Fox, standing with his head cocked over on one side as he always holds it when he's up to some mischief. I was in a terrible hurry, but it seemed safer to stop a bit till I'd found out what he was up to, and lucky it was that I did.

"Old Mr. Fox had his mind so taken up with the business on hand that he didn't hear me when I crept under the ferns where I could see all that was going on. He stood looking down sideways, as if trying to make up his mind just what to do, and then, suddenly, he began to scratch the dirt at a terrible rate. Of course, I knew he wasn't building a new house at that time of night, and after twisting my neck till I got a cramp in it trying to see, it popped into my head that he was working at the very place where Mr. Weasel killed my poor brother the summer before. Then I got mighty nervous, for I knew that none of our family was using the hole unless they'd gone in since I came from Cheeko's new flat.

"You might as well come out and save me the trouble of digging for you, Sonny Bunny,' Mr. Fox said, as he stopped to catch his breath, and my hair stood right up on end, for I began to understand that my little Sonny Bunny, meeting Mr. Fox on the way home, had dodged in there to get out of his way.

"It'll be the worse for you if you make me do all this work,' Mr. Fox said, breathing loud, for he didn't like to dig so hard for one small rabbit, and I just really held my breath, I was so afraid Sonny Bunny would think he could make matters any easier by trusting to that treacherous fox. But the little fellow had good sense and lay still as a mouse, so the miserable villain began digging again.

"Oh me, oh my, how hard I did try to think up some plan to help poor Sonny Bunny out of the scrape, for of course it wouldn't have been any use to make a fight with a fellow so much bigger than I was, and at last it seemed as if I'd struck just the plan.

"I snooped around through the bushes, holding my breath mighty hard, for Mr. Fox has a good pair of ears, till I was among a lot of raspberry vines not so very far from the old oak. I crept 'way in among them, although I got some pretty bad scratches, and when I was so far in that there was no danger the 'Squire could get hold of me, I sung out the best I knew how:

"'Oh, please, Mr. Crow, send somebody to help me, for I'm near choked to death here among the raspberry bushes and am afraid Mr. Weasel will come along before I can get out!'

"Then Mr. Fox stopped digging and pricked up his ears, making his voice sound mighty soft as he asked, as if he were my best friend:

"'Who is in trouble?'

"'It's Bunny Rabbit!' I cried, making believe I thought it was Mr. Crow who spoke. 'Please send somebody here right quick, dear Mr. Crow!'

"'I'm coming right away,' Mr. Fox said, still making his voice soft, and then I heard him come pattering along.

"Then was the time when Sonny Bunny should have scooted for dear life, but the little fellow hadn't had experience with bad wood folks and laid snug when he might have got away. It seemed to me that I was in a pickle, for if Mr. Fox came up while I was in the raspberry bushes I'd be likely to go home to supper with him, unless I got a fair chance to show how fast I could run, so I kept on yelling for help and Mr. Fox he kept trying to soothe me so's the rest of the folks who might be hungry shouldn't come up to invite me to a stew.

"You'd better believe I made the dirt fly, trying to back out of the place I'd gone into with the idea of helping Sonny Bunny, and it seemed as if I were getting into a worse hole every minute, when I heard something that made my blood run cold – it's a great wonder my hair didn't turn white. It was that soft, whirring noise the 'Squire makes when he flies and it looked as if I'd miss my share of the lettuce and carrots I'd spent so much time gathering.

"I might as well confess that I got all mixed up with knowing that Mr. Fox was after me on one side and somewhere in the air was the 'Squire watching for a chance to stick his big claws in my back, to say nothing of the fact that Mr. Weasel might have heard what was going on.

"I just shut my eyes and waited, wondering which one would get at me first, and then, suddenly, I heard a screech from Mr. Fox, with a yell from the 'Squire, at the same minute. I opened my eyes in a hurry and poked my nose out to see what had happened, but there was such a mix-up that it was quite a while before I could see anything but fur and feathers swinging around together like mad.

"You can guess that I didn't think about trying to save myself from being scratched by the thorns on the raspberry bushes; but dug out as quick as any rabbit ever did in this world, and oh, what a row I found going on! It seems that the 'Squire had caught sight of Mr. Fox, and, thinking it was me, dove down on him without stopping to make sure what he was tackling, burying his claws so deep that he couldn't pull them out in a hurry. Just at that very minute Mr. Weasel, who sure enough had heard me yelling, sneaked up, and there's no need of saying that he made a spring for the 'Squire, catching him by the neck.

"Now you know that when Mr. Weasel once gets a grip he doesn't let go in a hurry, leastways, not until he's got the upper hand of whoever is between his teeth, and there the three were floundering around in a way that would have made me laugh till I cried, if it hadn't been for poor little Sonny Bunny, who was most likely crouching in his uncle's old home so frightened that he didn't even know what his name was.

"I said to myself that if I missed this chance of getting away I might not have another, so off I started, but feeling mighty sorry that I couldn't stop to see the end of the row. Do you know that I had to go to the very lower end of my poor brother's house in order to get Sonny Bunny? He was so

scared that it didn't seem as if he heard me when I hollered for him to come out, and I was forced to drag the little fellow by the back of the neck so far that it made my jaws ache, for he isn't as much of a light-weight as he used to be.

"After a while I managed to shake some sense into him, and off we started for home, knowing by the yelps and hootings that the fight was still going on, with Mr. Weasel holding his tongue all the while, but most likely sawing a good deal of wood. We found Sonny's mother in what was just the same as a fainting fit when we went into the house; she had worried so much about us both that she couldn't stand it any longer, and off she went into a regular spell the minute she heard the patter of our feet on the dry leaves.

"Of course it took some time to bring her around all right, for I'm not a very good hand at such things, and Sonny is too young to be of much use in time of sickness, so I suppose the fight was ended before we had matters straightened out at home; but I wanted to sneak around through the bushes to see how the thing wound up, and I'd have done it, too, if Sonny's mother hadn't caught me by the ear, declaring that she'd suffered enough for one night, and I must stay with her and the baby.

"I'd have given a good deal to know how the row ended; but it was no use to argue with Mrs. Rabbit, so I put on my slippers and scurried around to help get dinner, for, goodness knows, it was time all three of us had something to eat. Nothing could have been better than those carrots, and I had eaten two, at the same time thinking what a fool I'd been for not bringing back more, when suddenly Sonny's mother threw up both paws as if she were dying, and before there was time to ask what had come over her, I heard the sound of some one scratching at our front door.

"I didn't dare even to wait long enough to quiet Mrs. Bunny, but off I ran through the hallway, which is very long in our house, as you may suppose, and before reaching the door I could smell Mr. Foxy Fox as plainly as I smell you this minute. Frightened? It seemed as if I couldn't put one paw before another, and for two or three minutes it looked as if I'd go home for supper with Mr. Fox. How he got out of the scrape with the 'Squire and Mr. Weasel I couldn't guess, except that those two were so busy with each other that he contrived to slip off quietly; but it didn't make very much difference to me just how it happened, for I had troubles of my own to look after.

"One thing was certain: that rascally old fox would have to do some digging before he could get at us, and I ran back to Mrs. Rabbit, who had pulled herself together a bit, holding her gently by the ears as I explained what was going on."

At this point Bunny stopped as if overcome by sad thoughts, and stroked his whiskers softly with one paw. To have broken in on his train of thought just then would have been downright cruelty; therefore it seemed necessary to wait until he was ready to continue the painful story.

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