

Where Little Chief Learned to Make Hay

by Thornton W. Burgess

No one in all the Great World thinks more of the present and less of the future than does careless, happy-go-lucky Peter Rabbit. Everybody who knows Peter at all knows that Peter doesn't waste any time worrying over what may happen in a day that may never be. So Peter isn't thrifty as are Happy Jack Squirrel and Chatterer the Red Squirrel and Whitefoot the Wood Mouse and Paddy the Beaver and Striped Chipmunk.

"I've got enough to eat today, and enough is enough, so what is the use of working when I don't have to?" says Peter. "I don't believe in working today so that I won't have to work tomorrow, because when tomorrow comes there may be no need of working, and then I would feel that I had wasted all this good time today." No, Peter isn't the least bit thrifty.

It is the same way with Peter's big cousin, Jumper the Hare. The truth is the whole family is happy-go-lucky. Happy Jack Squirrel says that every blessed one of them is shiftless. It does look that way. It is a pity that Peter and Jumper never have learned a lesson from Little Chief Hare, who is commonly supposed to be a relative of theirs, although, as a matter of fact, he is neither a Hare nor a Rabbit, but is a Pika, which is another family altogether. He is also called a Coney and sometimes the Calling Hare. But if you want sure-enough proof that he is neither a Rabbit nor a Hare, just watch him, if you are lucky enough to have a chance, cut and dry and store away a great pile of hay for winter use. No true member of Peter's family ever would think of doing such a thing as that, more is the pity.

Peter never has seen Little Chief, because Little Chief lives high up on a mountain of the Far West among the rocks where Peter would never go, even if he could, but he has heard all about him. Old Man Coyote told him all about him, and he got the story from his grandfather, who got it from his grandfather, who had one time visited the great mountain where Little Chief's ever-so-great-grandfather lived in the very place where Little Chief lives now. Old Man Coyote had chased Peter into the dear Old Briar-patch one cold winter day, and as he peered through the brambles at Peter he noticed that Peter was very thin, very thin indeed. Old Man Coyote grinned.

"I'm just as well pleased not to have caught you this time, Peter," said he. "You wouldn't make much of a dinner just now. When I dine I want something more than skin and bones. It must be that you are having as hard work as I am to get a living these days."

"I am," replied Peter. "With all this snow and ice on the ground, there is nothing to eat but bark and such tender twigs as I can reach, and they are not very filling. But they'll keep me alive until better times come, and then perhaps I'll get fat enough to suit you." It was Peter's turn to grin.

Old Man Coyote grinned back good-naturedly. "I should think, Peter," said he, "that when there is so much sweet grass and clover in the summer, you would make some of it into hay and store it away for winter, as Little Chief Hare does. There's the thrifty little hay-maker for you!"

"Who is Little Chief, and where did he learn to make hay?" demanded Peter, his ears standing straight up with curiosity.

Old Man Coyote likes to tell a story once in a while, and having nothing else to do just then, he

sat down just outside the dear Old Briar-patch and told Peter all about Little Chief and his hay-making.

"Of course," said he, "Little Chief's father taught him how to make hay, and his father's father taught him, and so on way back to the days when the world was young and Old Mother Nature made the first Pika or Coney, whichever you please to call him, and set him free on a great mountain to prove whether he was worthy to live or was so helpless that there was no place for him in the Great World. Now Mr. Pika, who was promptly called Little Chief, no one remembers now just why, was exactly like Little Chief of today. He was just about a fourth as big as you, Peter. In fact, he looked a lot like one of your babies, excepting his legs and his ears. His legs were short and rather weak, and his ears were short and rounded. He was very gentle and timid. He had neither the kind of teeth and claws for fighting nor long legs for running away, and it did seem as if Little Chief's chances of a long life and a happy one were very slim indeed, especially as it happened that he was set free to shift for himself just at the beginning of the hard times, when the big and strong had begun to hunt the small and weak.

"For a while Little Chief had a hard time of it and so many narrow escapes that his heart was in his mouth most of the time. In trying to keep out of the way of his enemies he kept climbing higher and higher up the mountain, for the higher he got the fewer enemies he found. At last he came to a big rock-slide above where the trees grew, and where there was nothing but broken stone and big rocks. The sun lay there very warm, and Little Chief crept out among the stones to take a sun-bath; as he squatted there it would have taken keen eyes indeed to tell him from a stone himself, though he didn't know this.

"After he had had a good rest, and jolly Mr. Sun had moved so that Little Chief was no longer in the warm rays, Little Chief decided to look about a little. It didn't take him long to discover that there were wonderful little winding galleries and hiding-places down among the stones. These led to little cracks and caves deep down in the mountain side. Little Chief was tickled almost to death.

"This is the place for me!" he cried. "No one ever will think to look for me up here, and if they should they couldn't find me, for no one, not even King Bear, could pull away these stones fast enough to catch me. All day long I can enjoy the sun, and at night I can sleep in perfect safety in one of these little caves."

"So Little Chief made his home in the rock-slide high up on the mountain and was happy, for it was just as he thought it would be—no one thought of looking in that bare place for him. For food he ate the pea vines and grasses and other green things that grew just at the edge of the rock-slide and was perfectly happy. One day he decided he would take some of his dinner into his little cave and eat it there. So he cut a little bundle of pea vine and other green things. He left his little bundle on a flat rock in the sun while he went to look for something else and then forgot all about it. It didn't enter his head again until a few days later he happened along by that flat rock and discovered that little bundle. The pea vines and grasses were quite dry, just like the hay Farmer Brown's boy helps his father store away in the barn every summer.

"I guess I don't want to eat that," said Little Chief, "but it will make me a very nice bed." So he carried it home and made a bed of it. There wasn't quite enough, so the next day he cut some more and carried it home at once. But this, being green, soon soured and smelled so badly that he was forced to take it out and throw it away. That set him to thinking. Why was the first he had brought in so dry and sweet and pleasant? Why didn't it spoil as the other had done? He cut some more and spread it out on the big flat rock and once again he forgot. When he remembered and went to look at it two or three days later, he found it just like the first, dry and sweet and very pleasant to smell. This he took home to add to his bed. Then he took home some more that was green, and this spoiled just as the other had

done.

"Little Chief was puzzling over this as he squatted on a rock taking a sun-bath. The sun was very warm and comforting. After a while the rock on which he sat grew almost hot. Little Chief had brought along a couple of pieces of pea vine on which to lunch, but not being hungry he left them beside him on the rock. By and by he happened to glance at them. They had wilted and already they were beginning to dry. An idea popped into his funny little head.

"It's the sun that does it!" he cried.

"Up he jumped and scampered away to cut some more and spread it out on the rocks. Then he discovered that the pea vine which he spread in the sun dried as he wanted it to, while any that happened to be left in the shadow of a rock didn't dry so well. He had learned how to make hay. He was the first hay-maker in the Great World. He soon had more than enough for a bed, but he kept on making hay and storing it away just for fun. Then came cold weather and all the green things died. There was no food for Little Chief. He hunted and hunted, but there was nothing. Then because he was so hungry he began to nibble at his hay. It tasted good, very good indeed. It tasted almost as good as the fresh green things. Little Chief's heart gave a great leap. He had food in plenty! He had nothing to worry about, for his hay would last him until the green things came again, as come they would, he felt sure.

"And so it proved. And that is how Little Chief the Pika learned to make hay while the sun shone in the days of plenty. He taught his children and they taught their children, and Little Chief of today does it just as his great-great-ever-so-great-grand-daddy did. I don't see why you don't do the same thing, Peter. You would make me a great deal finer dinner if you did."

"Perhaps that is the reason I don't," replied Peter with a grin.

Source:

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