

The Little Bunny Meets the Little Boy

by John Breck

“Whiskers!” Nibble started to his feet at the very idea.

“What if the Terrible Storm should be over and Silvertip comes sneaking back!” And immediately they all looked very serious. They seemed to feel in their hearts that something had gone wrong while they were having their fun. A moment more and they knew it!

Nibble started to scratch away the snow that had drifted the door of the cornstalk tent closed behind them, three days ago. He clawed and he thumped and he pushed and he squirmed but at last he had to sit back and confess, “My nails won’t take a hold. It’s all solid ice outside. We’re frozen in!”

“Frozen in!” exclaimed the partridge. They knew what that meant. It meant that you couldn’t breathe through ice as you can through snow, so you smother in the long run. It seemed that Nibble’s lovely party was going to have a sad ending indeed.

The partridge tried but soon tired out. Then Gimlet tried, but he only froze his bill.

Suddenly, Bump! Bump! sounded from outside.

“It’s Silvertip,” said Chatter sadly. “He’s digging his way in.”

“He can’t catch us all,” answered Nibble, “unless we stay inside. We must burst out in a body, right in his face, and take our chances. Ready now—here we go!”

And at the word the snow crashed in on the tent floor and Nibble leaped through the hole, with the partridges roaring their wings behind him.

Nibble threw a frightened look over his shoulder as he ran to see if Silvertip were following. Then he stopped dead, and turned around, and sat up and took a good long look, exactly as he said he would. “That’s a Man,” he said to himself “That’s a Man, for sure and certain. What paws!”

It was Tommy Peel, in his new red mittens, who had kicked in the door with the heel of his tall rubber boots to see what was making that noise inside. And he was just about as grown-up for a Man as Nibble was for a Rabbit. And what he was doing out in the Broad Field was an awful secret.

Said Nibble to himself, “He’s not at all like a frog and he’s not like Grandpop Snappingturtle one little bit. He reminds me much more of Redwing the Blackbird.” That was because Tommy had on his dark navy-blue sweater and his new red mittens and his tall rubber boots. “That isn’t fur nor feathers nor scales he’s wearing, but it certainly isn’t skin. Nevertheless,” Nibble told himself, “he has no tail, so a man is all he can possibly be. But he hasn’t any hunger-light in his eyes. I wonder why he’s so much to be feared?”

“That’s the cunningest little bunny,” thought Tommy Peele. “I wish I could catch it and put it in a cage to play with. I believe I’ll set a trap for it.”

Now if Tommy had wanted to kill him, Nibble would have known by the way he looked. But Nibble never dreamed of a trap. That was another thing he didn't know about. And Tommy didn't think of killing Nibble because he was only nine years old and you have to be thirteen years old and in the eighth grade before you can have a gun.

Besides, wild things only hunt so that they can eat. But if Tommy Peele could only catch Nibble, he meant to be very good to him. He was going to give him the best of food and a fine cage. He didn't think Nibble would be unhappy with a nice cosy place to live in. You see Tommy Peele lived in a house himself, which is a kind of a cage when you come to think about it. He didn't think how different that was from living like a wild thing.

So the small boy and the smaller rabbit were looking at each other in a very friendly way. When all of a sudden the Wind told Nibble something. A light crunch of snow tickled his long ear and a soft whiff of scent tickled his nose. Silvertip the Fox had just jumped over the rail fence into the Clover Patch, right behind him.

“Danger! Come along!” he thumped with his little hind feet. “This way! It's all clear ahead!” he flashed in rabbit signals from his puffy tail. And he dashed off down the Broad Field.

But Tommy Peele didn't follow. You see he didn't understand that sort of talk. He just turned and looked after Nibble, saying to himself, “I wish that little bunny wasn't so skeery. Wonder if I couldn't tame him?”

Nibble made a proper triangle and brought up under a thorn bush in the fence row before he dared to look behind him. And then his heart gave an awful bump. For there stood Tommy Peele in his red mittens, exactly where Nibble had left him. He had turned around so he could watch Nibble. And Silvertip was creeping up behind him! The wind was blowing straight from Silvertip to Tommy, warning him as plainly as it had warned Nibble two minutes before, but Tommy didn't pay any attention. “Poor Man,” Nibble almost sobbed. “You won't listen to the wind and you won't listen to me — I wish your mother were here to take care of you.” He said that because he was still so lonely for his own mammy.

Silvertip sniffed about the first corn shock. Then he crept along, pretty carefully, to the one where the owls had found him, and Nibble had given his party. Suddenly he caught sight of Tommy Peele, red mittens, tall rubber boots, and all, standing with his back to him. And he leaped—but he leaped the other way as fast as ever he could. And Nibble wanted to kick up his heels with joy, because he knew something Silvertip was afraid of. But Tommy Peele never knew anything at all about it.

Just about the time Silvertip's tail dusted the middle rail of the fence, Tommy decided to follow the bunny and see where he had gone to. Nibble had been calling him to run away from Silvertip a minute or two before, but now he didn't wait for Tommy Peele. “If that wicked fox is so frightened,” he said to himself, “I can't be too careful. But I don't see what he could do to me; he hasn't any claws and he most certainly can't run.”

Of course Tommy had to wade slowly through the snow while Nibble could go skimming and skipping over the top of it. So the little rabbit just went a short way farther and hid behind a fence post.

Tommy tramped and trudged until he had followed the bunny tracks to where Nibble had hidden in the bush. “Oh, ho!” said Nibble at last. “That Man doesn't hunt like the Woodsfolk. Glider

the Blacksnake could only smell, not see, where I had gone. This creature can see, and not smell. I've got to stop making tracks in this snow."

He looked all around. Then he saw that he was in another field, farther from the Woods than he had ever dared to come. Cattle were walking about in it, dragging their feet the way they do, and ploughing away the snow with their broad black noses to get at the frosty grass. So Nibble danced down a sprawly cow track where his soft feet wouldn't leave any trace. And then he jumped over to a small grey stone with a little peaked snow cap on it and snuggled up so close that he looked like a part of it. And Tommy Peele walked right by and never saw him.

Nibble thought this kind of hide and seek was pretty good fun. He was quite disappointed when Tommy went off without looking for him any longer. Still, the grass tasted very sweet where the cows had scraped off the snow for him. Pretty soon he said to himself: "I guess I'd better be thinking about getting back to the Woods again. I'll be safer if I can reach the Clover Patch without meeting—"

And he stopped right on that word. For there, following his trail, was the very beast he was thinking of—Silvertip! And Silvertip doesn't have to see any one to follow him!

"There's only one thing for me to do," thought the Bunny. "I'll make a new triangle and end up on that big Brown Log over there." So he did. And he crouched down on it as close as ever he could and held his breath while Silvertip came closer and closer. Now he was by the stone! Now he was at the grassy spot! Now—

Now that big Brown Log did a very queer thing. It began to move. It rocked and it heaved and then it raised itself right off the ground. Nibble was so stiff with fright that all he could do was dig in his toes and hold on. And then it switched its tail. It was a cow who had chosen a chilly spot to lie down!

That tail sent Nibble spinning. Luckily he landed right side up and went bouncing off faster than when Glider was chasing him. But Silvertip didn't see him. Silvertip was too busy on his own account.

For that cow wasn't the sleepy and serious kind. She was young and active. But Silvertip, coming along with his nose to the ground, didn't see her.

She lowered her horns and rolled her eyes around, pawing footfuls of snow about her shoulders. "Wolf!" she suddenly bellowed and ran at him.

Nibble Rabbit thought his end had come. But his feet didn't think at all; they just ran. They ran while he was turning a somersault through the air and they ran faster when they felt the fluffy snow. And if they hadn't run right into the big haystack at the end of the pasture there's no knowing how far they would have taken him. But there was a nice little hole under it, waiting for him to come right in and hide.

But you know Nibble. First he's scared, and next he's curious. Just as soon as he thought nothing was following him he stuck out his little whiskers to sniff about and put up his long ears to listen. And he heard a lot of little birds cheeping and gossiping up above him. One of them said, "There he is! I say, Bunny, what did you do that for?"

"Do what?" demanded Nibble, craning his neck so he could see who he was talking to. "What

did I do, Mr. Chirp?”

“Tried to ride the red heifer,” answered Chirp Sparrow.

“But I didn’t! Indeed I didn’t!” cried the little rabbit. “Silvertip was chasing me, so I jumped back from my trail on to a log. I was going to slip down behind it and run away as soon as he had gone past, so he wouldn’t smell me on the ground. That’s what we always do. But something happened.”

“So it seems,” replied Chirp Sparrow in an amused voice. “Don’t you know what it was?”

“Not yet,” said Nibble, “My head’s still whirling.”

“I should think it might be,” laughed Chirp. And the other sparrows seemed to think it was so funny they all started to giggle and talk at once, which made Nibble’s head whirl harder than ever.

“Hush!” Chirp ordered. “I want to tell him myself. Well, that log you hopped up on was a cow. She was taking a nap and you woke her up. When she started to get up you dug your claws into her so she switched her tail—I wish you could have seen yourself. You went tumbling over and over like a curly thorn leaf in a west wind.” And he stopped to laugh again.

“But Silvertip?” asked Nibble anxiously.

“Yes, Silvertip was the funniest of all.” Chirp shook himself so he could sober up to tell the rest of it. “The cow looked all around to see who had been disturbing her and there was Silvertip. So she must have blamed it on him. You ought to have seen her chase him. Silly thing. He just tumbled through the fence, any old way, and made off, but she thinks she’s still after him.”

Sure enough, Nibble could see the red heifer with her swishy tail stuck straight up in the air, waving the tasselly tip of it, leaping and mooing and snorting at the other end of the field.

“I thought that was a queer log,” he said thoughtfully. “It made my toes all warm and there wasn’t any snow on top of it. But it had such a nice safe, warm-hole sort of a smell, with little clovery whiffs mixed in with it. Cows must be awfully dangerous!”

“Dangerous!” hooted Chirp. “A cow dangerous! Why, the only thing she’s dangerous to is a clover-top. That’s what she eats, and that’s why she smells of it.”

“But Silvertip was afraid of her.” Nibble was really puzzled.

“Silvertip? Oh, well. That’s another story,” said Chirp.

“Away back when the world was new—tell me about it.” Now Nibble was all pleased and excited.

Source:

Breck, John. "The Little Bunny Meets the Little Boy." *Mostly About Nibble the Bunny*. Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1923. Electronic.