

Nibble Digs Into Trouble – and Slips Out

by John Breck

Suddenly Nibble put up his ears and put down his nose in great surprise. Then he hopped up on to the grey stone where he had hidden from Tommy Peele, and looked carefully about him. For he could see Tommy Peele's footsteps following his own trail, just ahead of him, and Tommy Peele's dark blue sweater and red mittens looking more than ever like Redwing the Blackbird, not so very far away. He couldn't see Tommy's tall rubber boots because they were hidden behind the cornstalk tent down in the Broad Field.

"Now I wonder what he's doing there?" Nibble asked himself. He never for a minute thought of being afraid. He didn't even know that what Tommy was doing had anything to do with him.

Well, when Nibble Rabbit isn't afraid he's always curious. He made a triangle or two of his tracks because he meant to be awfully careful about this "man," as he called Tommy, and crept up behind him.

And what do you think Tommy was doing? He was making a figure-four trap. He took a soap box and balanced it on top of three little sticks. One was a bait stick. He had speared it through a fine fat carrot. And when he got them all fitted together he took a handful of wheat out of his pocket and spread it under the box. Any one could eat the wheat, but the box would come down "blam!" on the first fellow who touched that carrot. Only it wouldn't hurt him. He'd just be caught in there under the soap box until Tommy came and took him out. That is unless he could dig under the edge of it.

But that isn't what happened to Nibble. Oh, no!

For before he ever reached it there were three little mice in it. They were the very same mice Nibble had invited to that very same cornstalk tent on the night of his Storm Party. The lady mouse hopped up on that bait stick and—

"Blam!" Down came the soap box. But of course that didn't bother the mice at all. They felt safer in the dark and it was warm and comfortable after the box shut the wind out.

Nibble came leaping up. "Are you hurt?" he called.

"No!" answered the mice all at once. "It's perfectly lovely in here." And the lady mouse added, "We've found the loveliest root I ever set tooth to. I think it must be some of that Water Chinquapin Doctor Muskrat gave you. Do come and help us eat it."

So Nibble Rabbit's busy little feet found a crack in the crust and made the snow fly. "Scratch-scratch!" went his claws.

"Hurry up!" called his mouse friends who were inside. "We've eaten up half of this lovely root already." They were perfectly willing to give him his share—if he could only get in with them to eat it. And he was doing his very best.

"Crunch, crunch. Nibble, nibble, nibble," went their busy teeth. They didn't mean to be selfish,

but a mouse is such a hungry little thing it just can't wait for any one.

Now Tommy Peele had heard the "blam!" when his trap was sprung.

So he came hurrying back as fast as ever he could in his tall rubber boots. He was making all manner of noise, but nobody heard him. For Nibble already had his head under the trap. His sprawly legs were spread out to get a good grip on the snow, and even his puffy tail seemed trying to help him as he squirmed into it. And didn't Tommy Peele laugh when he saw that! Who ever heard of anything so foolish as digging into a trap.

"Here," said the Lady Mouse, remembering how she had eaten Nibble's corn in the little cornstalk tent; "you'll find the heart is the sweetest." And soon the juice was dripping from Nibble's busy little jaws.

"It isn't water chinquapin," he found time to say, "but it's quite as good. And this place seems nice and safe. I don't think even Silvertip the Fox could catch us."

"Hush!" said the mouse. "I think I hear that awful beast every time you speak of him."

But Nibble was too busy making up for lost time even to listen.

Up crept Tommy Peele with his eyes on the place where Nibble crawled in. At last he got his hand over it. Then he hit the box on the other side.

Then didn't those foolish little beasts who were feasting on his carrot sit up and listen? And didn't they start to run? But there wasn't any place to run to! For Nibble finally found his hole—with Tommy Peele's red mitten in it. And his poor little heart began to beat like mad. "Mice," he whispered, "it's that Man!"

So they huddled up into a miserable little heap in the very middle of that soap box and waited. And Tommy waited, too.

But they kept so very still he said to himself, "I wonder if that bunny's got out on the other side." So he looked all around, and of course he saw there were no fresh tracks in the snow. Then he pulled off one of his mittens and reached in to feel.

And his hand found Nibble's soft, warm fur. And his fingers hunted for Nibble's floppy ears. But they just happened to touch the nose of that Lady Mouse.

"Ow, ow, ow-w-w! Leggo!" shouted Tommy. And trap and sticks and rabbit and mice went whirling. And Tommy danced up and down in his tall rubber boots.

In the whole world you could not have found a more frightened bunny than Nibble when Tommy Peele held him up by his long ears and started toward the barn. I wish I could tell you right now what happened to him then, but, bless me, so many things happened that this book simply will not hold them. It is all written down, though, and if you want to know how he made friends with the Red Cow and how he learned about Tad Coon and how he learned about many other things you can read about every bit of it in the other books about Nibble and his friends. 'Cause that Lady Mouse had bitten him.

But Nibble didn't know that. He dashed across the snow, his tufty tail flicking at every jump, "Catch me if you can!" And of course Tommy couldn't. Not just then.

But later— Well, that's another story—and a good one, too. The Red Cow is in it, and Ouphe the Rat, and Chirp, and Watch the Dog, and Tad Coon, and Doctor Muskrat, of course, and—and— Oh, you'll just have to wait till that story has a cover of its own, I guess. 'Cause this one's too full to squeeze it in.

Source:

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