

Why Nibble Bunny Was Puzzled

by John Breck

You remember all the funny things Nibble heard about Man from the guests who came to his Storm Party. That was the time the Big Hollow Oak blew down, and the brave little bunny who lived at Doctor Muskrat's Pond rescued all the poor homeless folk who had been shaken out of it. He showed them the way to a fine little tent all made of cornstalks out in the Broad Field.

It was so nice and snug and comfortable, the minute they tucked their tails inside it, and caught their breaths, and sleeked down their fur and their feathers, they forgot all about how the Terrible Storm was having a tantrum outside. They had plenty of room to dance, and plenty of corn for refreshments—why, the party was as big a success as if they'd held it in a hired hall with engraved invitations.

But the most fun they had was talking about folks like you and me. And if you'd laid an ear to a crack before the wind tucked the snow blanket all around them, you wouldn't have been very much flattered by what they said, either.

You might have overheard the bats insisting that Man looked like a frog. (You might say that about some folks, of course, but certainly not about you or me.) You'd prob'ly have heard the partridge say that Man was brown and wrinkly, like Grandpop Snapping-Turtle. (The man they saw certainly must have worn some funny clothes.) Chatter Squirrel said Man was pink and tan. (His pink was sunburn—the kind the fellows get down at the swimming-hole.)

Everyone just knew that everyone else was wrong. Then Gimlet Woodpecker insisted Man came as many shapes and sizes and colours as the flowers. And then they didn't know what to think. There were just two things they all agreed on: he didn't have a tail, and—he was dangerous. Nibble didn't say anything, 'cause he'd never seen one.

But the first time he set eyes on Tommy Peele, he made up his mind they were all wrong—excepting about the tail. The little boy looked to him like a red-wing blackbird. (That was 'cause Tommy had on his new red mittens and his dark blue sweater and his shiny rubber boots.) But dangerous? He certainly didn't look it. Still—when Silvertip the Fox only caught a glimpse of him, he turned tail and ran.

So Nibble made up his mind to copy the mouse motto: "Say nothing and stay cautious." At least that's what he thought he was—too cautious for anything. Wasn't it perfectly safe and proper to dig into that queer lair where the mice were holding a party of their own? Wasn't it nice and dark as his own hole? And nobody could possibly see him.

How was a bunny to know it was a soapbox? Or that it was part of a "figger-four" trap? Or that Tommy had set it 'specially for him?

You see he hadn't been caught. He'd dug into it on purpose, because those nice little mice had invited him. And there the three of them were busy feasting when they heard the clump! clump! clump! of the clumsy hind paws of that little boy.

"Mice," he said, "it's that Man!"

Before he could twiddle a tail, Tommy's red mitten was across the hole, and Tommy's bare pink paw was closing on—the lady mouse. Then things began to fly!

Nibble was among them. He flew to the next little cornstalk tent, his heart thumping faster than his paws. "They were all of them right!" he gasped. "That Man is dangerous—dangerous as Silvertip himself. Poor Satin-skin! I s'pose that's the end of her."

He never thought of saying, "Poor Tommy Peele!" But Tommy was the right one to feel sorry for. Satin-skin had closed her little needle teeth on his finger. And before Nibble had taken a long breath he heard a voice squeaking, "Weeak! weeak! weeak!" which is mouse for, "I'm lost! Where are you?"

"Here!" he thumped with both hind feet. And who should come scuttling in but Satin-skin herself? He could feel her tremble all over as she tried to squirm right under him.

"My ears!" Nibble exclaimed. "I thought that Man had caught you!"

"No, I caught him!" wept the little lady mouse. "But he shook me so hard I was scared to let go again. And when I did, he sent me tail over ears. I tell you, it was awful! wee-eeak!"

"Shh! he'll hear you," Nibble warned. "There, your head will stop whirling pretty soon." He knew just how she felt, 'cause he'd felt the same way himself—the time he tumbled off the back of that Red Cow he took for a log when Silvertip was chasing him.

But Tommy wasn't even thinking about Satin-skin, let alone listening for her. He stamped his tall rubber boots and sucked his poor nipped finger. "Funniest thing!" he wondered to himself. "I just know there was a rabbit in that trap. I saw him go in there. I don't guess it's very much good. I'll try the pitcher-wire."

So he pulled on his red mitten and tramped off to the path in the bushes by the fence he'd seen Nibble slip through. This time he bent down a springy sapling and tied a loop of wire to the tip of it—the soft kind you use to hang pictures. And he pegged the lower edge of the loop across Nibble's pathway.

Source:

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