

Peter Rabbit's Egg Rolling

by Thornton W. Burgess

It was spring. Drummer the Woodpecker was beating the long roll on the hollow limb of the old hickory, that all the world might know. Old Mother West Wind, hurrying down from the Purple Hills across the Green Meadows, stopped long enough to kiss the smiling little bluets that crowded along the Lone Little Path. All up and down the Laughing Brook were shy violets turning joyful faces up to jolly, round, red Mr. Sun. Johnny Chuck was sitting on his doorstep, stretching one short leg and then another, to get the kinks out, after his long, long winter sleep. Very beautiful, very beautiful indeed, were the Green Meadows, and very happy were all the little meadow people—all but Peter Rabbit, who sat at the top of the Crooked Little Path that winds down the hill. No, Sir, Peter Rabbit, happy-go-lucky Peter, who usually carries the lightest heart on the Green Meadows, was not happy. Indeed, he was very unhappy. As he sat there at the top of the Crooked Little Path and looked down on the Green Meadows, he saw nothing beautiful at all because, why, because his big soft eyes were full of tears. Splash! A big tear fell at his feet in the Crooked Little Path. Splash! That was another tear. Splash! splash!

"My gracious! My gracious! What *is* the matter, Peter Rabbit?" asked a gruff voice close to one of Peter's long ears.

Peter jumped. Then he winked the tears back and looked around. There sat old Mr. Toad. He looked very solemn, very solemn indeed. He was wearing a shabby old suit, the very one he had slept in all winter. Peter forgot his troubles long enough to wonder if old Mr. Toad would swallow his old clothes when he got a new suit.

"What's the matter, Peter Rabbit, what's the matter?" repeated old Mr. Toad.

Peter looked a little foolish. He hesitated, coughed, looked this way and looked that way, hitched his trousers up, and then, why then he found his tongue and told old Mr. Toad all his troubles.

"You see," said Peter Rabbit, "it's almost Easter and I haven't found a single egg."

"An egg!" exclaimed old Mr. Toad. "Bless my stars! What do you want of an egg, Peter Rabbit? You don't eat eggs."

"I don't want just one egg, oh, no, no indeed! I want a lot of eggs," said Peter. "You see, Mr. Toad, I was going to have an Easter egg rolling, and here it is almost Easter and not an egg to be found!" Peter's eyes filled with tears again.

Old Mr. Toad rolled one eye up at jolly, round, red Mr. Sun and winked. "Have you seen Mrs. Grouse and Mrs. Pheasant?" asked old Mr. Toad.

"Yes," said Peter Rabbit, "and they won't have any eggs until after Easter."

"Have you been to see Mrs. Quack?" asked old Mr. Toad.

"Yes," said Peter Rabbit, "and she says she can't spare a single one."

Old Mr. Toad looked very thoughtful. He scratched the tip of his nose with his left hind foot. Then he winked once more at jolly, round, red Mr. Sun. "Have you been to see Jimmy Skunk?" he inquired.

Peter Rabbit's big eyes opened very wide. "Jimmy Skunk!" he exclaimed. "Jimmy Skunk! What does Jimmy Skunk have to do with eggs?"

Old Mr. Toad chuckled deep down in his throat. He chuckled and chuckled until he shook all over.

"Jimmy Skunk knows more about eggs than all the other little meadow people put together," said old Mr. Toad. "You take my advice, Peter Rabbit, and ask Jimmy Skunk to help you get the eggs for your Easter egg rolling."

Then old Mr. Toad picked up his cane and started down the Crooked Little Path to the Green Meadows. There he found the Merry Little Breezes stealing kisses from the bashful little wind flowers. Old Mr. Toad puffed out his throat and pretended that he disapproved, disapproved very much indeed, but at the same time he rolled one eye up at jolly, round, red Mr. Sun and winked.

"Haven't you anything better to do than make bashful little flowers hang their heads?" asked old Mr. Toad gruffly.

The Merry Little Breezes stopped their dancing and gathered about old Mr. Toad. "What's the matter with you this morning, Mr. Toad?" asked one of them. "Do you want us to go find a breakfast for you?"

"No," replied old Mr. Toad sourly. "I am quite able to get breakfast for myself. But Peter Rabbit is up on the hill crying because he cannot find any eggs."

"Crying because he cannot find any eggs! Now what does Peter Rabbit want of eggs?" cried the Merry Little Breezes all together.

"Supposing you go ask him," replied old Mr. Toad tartly, once more picking up his cane and starting for the Smiling Pool to call on his cousin, Grandfather Frog.

The Merry Little Breezes stared after him for a few minutes, then they started in a mad race up the Crooked Little Path to find Peter Rabbit. He wasn't at the top of the Crooked Little Path. They looked everywhere, but not so much as the tip of one of his long ears could they see. Finally they met him just coming away from Jimmy Skunk's house. Peter was hopping, skipping, jumping up in the air and kicking his long heels as only Peter can. There was no trace of tears in his big, soft eyes. Plainly Peter Rabbit was in good spirits, in the very best of spirits. When he saw the Merry Little Breezes he jumped twice as high as he had jumped before, then sat up very straight.

"Hello!" said Peter Rabbit.

"Hello yourself," replied the Merry Little Breezes. "Tell us what under the sun you want of eggs, Peter Rabbit, and we'll try to find some for you."

Peter's eyes sparkled. "I'm going to have an Easter egg rolling," said he, "but you needn't look

for any eggs, for I am going to have all I want; Jimmy Skunk has promised to get them for me."

"What is an Easter egg rolling?" asked the Merry Little Breezes.

Peter looked very mysterious. "Wait and see," he replied. Then a sudden thought popped into his head. "Will you do something for me?" he asked.

Of course the Merry Little Breezes were delighted to do anything they could for Peter Rabbit, and told him so. So in a few minutes Peter had them scattering in every direction with invitations to all the little people of the Green Meadows and all the little folks of the Green Forest to attend his egg rolling on Easter morning.

Very, very early on Easter morning Old Mother West Wind hurried down from the Purple Hills and swept all the rain clouds out of the sky. Jolly, round, red Mr. Sun climbed up in the sky, smiling his broadest. All the little song birds sang their sweetest, and some who really cannot sing at all tried to just because they were so happy. Across the beautiful Green Meadows came all the little meadow people and forest folks to the smooth, grassy bank where the big hickory grows. Peter Rabbit was there waiting for them. He had brushed his clothes until you would hardly have known him. He felt very much excited and very important and very, very happy, for this was to be the very first egg rolling the Green Meadows had ever known, and it was all his very own.

Hidden behind the old hickory, tucked under pieces of bark, scattered among the bluets and wind flowers were big eggs, little eggs and middle-sized eggs, for Jimmy Skunk had been true to his promise. Where they came from Jimmy wouldn't tell. Perhaps if old Gray Goose and Mrs. Quack could have been there, they would have understood why it took so long to fill their nests. Perhaps if Farmer Brown's boy had happened along, he would have guessed why he had to hunt so long in the barn and under the henhouse to get enough eggs for breakfast. But Jimmy Skunk held his tongue and just smiled to see how happy Peter Rabbit was.

First came Peter's cousin, Jumper the Hare. Then up from the Smiling Pool came Jerry Muskrat, Little Joe Otter, Billy Mink, Grandfather Frog and Spotty the Turtle. Johnny Chuck, Danny Meadow Mouse, and old Mr. Toad came together. Of course Reddy Fox was on hand promptly. Striped Chipmunk came dancing out from the home no one has been able to find. Out from the Green Forest trotted Bobby Coon, Happy Jack Squirrel and Chatterer the Red Squirrel. Behind them shuffled Prickly Porky. Last of all came Jimmy Skunk, who never hurries, and Jimmy wore his very best suit of black and white. Up in the old hickory sat Blacky the Crow, Sammy Jay and Drummer the Woodpecker, to watch the fun.

When all had arrived, Peter Rabbit started them to hunting for the eggs. Everybody got in the way of everybody else. Even old Mr. Toad caught the excitement and hopped this way and hopped that way hunting for eggs. Danny Meadow Mouse found a goose egg bigger than himself and had to get help to bring it in. Bobby Coon stubbed his toes and fell down with an egg under each arm. Such a looking sight as he was! He had to go down to the Smiling Pool to wash.

By and by, when all the eggs had been found, Peter Rabbit sent a big goose egg rolling down the grassy bank and then raced after it to bring it back and roll it down again. In a few minutes the green grassy bank was covered with eggs—big eggs, little eggs, all kinds of eggs. Some were nearly round and rolled swiftly to the bottom. Some were sharp pointed at one end and rolled crookedly and sometimes turned end over end. A big egg knocked Johnny Chuck's legs from under him and, because

Johnny Chuck is round and roly-poly, he just rolled over and over after the egg clear to the bottom of the green grassy bank. And it was such fun that he scrambled up and did it all over again.

Then Bobby Coon tried it. Pretty soon every one was trying it, even Reddy Fox, who seldom forgets his dignity. For once Blacky the Crow and Sammy Jay almost wished that they hadn't got wings, so that they might join in the fun.

But the greatest fun of all was when Prickly Porky decided that he, too, would join in the rolling. He tucked his head down in his vest and made himself into a perfectly round ball. Now when he did this, all his hidden spears stood out straight, until he looked like a great, giant, chestnut burr, and every one hurried to get out of his way. Over and over, faster and faster, he rolled down the green, grassy bank until he landed—where do you think? Why right in the midst of a lot of eggs that had been left when the other little people had scampered out of his way.

Now, having his head tucked into his vest, Prickly Porky couldn't see where he was going, so when he reached the bottom and hopped to his feet he didn't know what to make of the shout that went up from all the little meadow people. So foolish Prickly Porky lost his temper because he was being laughed at, and started off up the Lone Little Path to his home in the Green Forest. And what do you think? Why, stuck fast in a row on the spears on his back, Prickly Porky carried off six of Peter Rabbit's Easter eggs, and didn't know it.

Source:

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