

WHEN MR. MOOSE LOST HIS HORNS

Thornton W. Burgess

PETER RABBIT had just seen Flathorns the Moose for the first time, and Peter was having hard work to believe that there wasn't something the matter with his eyes. Indeed they looked as if something was the matter with them, for they seemed about to pop right out of his head. If any one had *told* Peter that any one as big as Flathorns lived in the Great Woods, he wouldn't have believed it, but now that he had *seen* that it was so, he just had to believe. So Peter sat with his eyes popping out and his mouth gaping wide open in the most foolish way as he stared in the direction in which Flathorns had gone.

"Big, isn't he?"

Peter looked up to see Blacky the Crow in the top of a birch-tree just at one side, and Blacky, too, was looking after Flathorns. Then Blacky looked down at Peter and began to laugh. "Don't try to swallow him, Peter!" said he.

Peter closed his mouth with a snap.

"My, but he *is* big!" he exclaimed. "I never felt so small in all my life as when I first caught sight of him. What queer horns he has! I suppose they are horns, for he carries them on his head just as Lightfoot the Deer does his. They are so big I should think they would make his head ache."

"Perhaps they do, and that is why he drops them every spring and grows a new pair during the summer," replied Blacky.

"Drops them! Drops those great horns and grows new ones in a single summer! Do you mean to tell me that hard things like those horns grow? And what do you mean by saying that he drops them every spring? Why, I saw him banging them against a tree just now, and I guess if they ever were coming off they would have come off then. You can't fool me with any such story as that, Blacky!"

"Have it your own way, Peter," replied Blacky. "Some people never can believe a thing until they see it with their own eyes. All I've got to say is just keep an eye on Flathorns in the spring and then remember what I've told you." Before Peter could reply Blacky had spread his wings, and with a harsh "Caw, caw, caw," had flown away.

Of course, after that Peter was very very curious about Flathorns the

Moose, and he just ached all over to ask about those horns. But every time he saw them the idea that they ever would or could come off seemed so impossible that he held his tongue. You see, he didn't want to be laughed at. So the winter passed, and Peter was no wiser than before. Then the spring came, and one never-to-be-forgotten day Peter was hurrying along, lipperty-lipperty-lip, when right in front of him lay something that made him stop short and stare even harder than he had stared the first time he saw Flat-horns. What was it? Why, it was one of those very horns he had thought so much about! Yes, Sir, that is just what it was.

Even then Peter couldn't believe it was so. He couldn't believe it until he had hunted up Flathorns himself and seen with his own eyes that there were no longer any horns on that great head. Then Peter *had* to believe. It seemed to Peter the strangest thing he ever had heard of. There must be a reason, and if there were, Grandfather Frog would be sure to know it. So every day Peter visited the Smiling Pool to see if Grandfather Frog had wakened from his long winter sleep. At last one day he found him and could hardly wait to tell him how glad he was to see him once more and to be properly polite before he asked him about those horns of Flat-horns the Moose.

“Chug-a-rum!” said Grandfather Frog. “It’s pretty early in the season to be asking me for a story, but seeing it is you, Peter, and that you’ve waited all winter for it, I’ll tell it to you. Way, way back in the days when the world was young, the first Moose, the great-great-ever-so-great-grandfather of Flathorns, was the biggest of all the animals in the Green Forest, but he had no horns, and he was such a homely fellow that everybody laughed at him and made fun of him. Now nothing hurts quite so much as being laughed at.”

“I know,” interrupted Peter.

“Mr. Moose felt so badly about it that he used to hide away and keep out of sight all he possibly could,” continued Grandfather Frog. “Big as he was and strong as he was, he would turn and run away to hide from even such little people as Mr. Skunk and Mr. Squirrel and your ever-so-great-grand-father, Mr. Rabbit. He just couldn’t bear to be laughed at. Old Mother Nature kept her eye on him and at last she took pity on him and crowned his head with the most wonderful horns, horns so big that no one smaller than Mr. Moose could possibly have carried them.

“Then Mr. Moose threw up his head and carried it proudly, for now no one laughed at him. He marched through the Great Woods boldly, and even old King Bear, who was king no longer, stepped aside respectfully. Then pride entered into Mr. Moose; pride in his wonderful horns; pride in his great strength. He feared no one. He beat the bushes with his great horns and bellowed until the Great Woods rang with his voice, and all those who had once laughed at him hid in fear. He proclaimed himself king of the Great Woods, and no one dared to deny it.

“So he came and went when and where he pleased and felt himself every inch a king and carried his great horns as a crown. One day in the beginning of the springtime, he came face to face with Old Mother Nature. Once he would have bowed to her very humbly, but by now he had grown so proud and haughty that instead of stepping aside for her to pass, he boldly marched on with his head held high as if he did not see her. It was Old Mother Nature who stepped aside. She said nothing, but as he passed she reached forth and touched his great horns and they fell from his head, and with them fell all his pride and haughtiness. At once some of his neighbors who had been hiding near and had seen all that had happened began to mock him and make fun of him and laugh at him.

“Then, with his head hung low in shame, did Mr. Moose slink away and hide as he had done in the beginning, and none could find him save Old Mother Nature. Very humble was Mr. Moose when she visited him; all his pride was melted away in shame. Old Mother Nature was sorry for him. She promised him that he should have new horns, but that once a year he should lose his horns lest he should forget and again become over-proud and haughty. So while he kept hidden, the new horns grew and grew until they were greater and more wonderful than the ones he had had before. Then Mr. Moose once more came forth, holding his head high and glorying in his strength, and all his neighbors treated him with the greatest respect, quite as if he were really king of the Great Woods.

“But he never forgot what Old Mother Nature had said to him, and when the spring came, he slipped away and hid lest he should be seen without the glory of his horns, for in his heart he knew that Old Mother Nature would keep her word. Sure enough, his great horns dropped off, and in humbleness and patience he waited for new horns to grow. So it was all the years of his life, and so it has been with his children and his grandchildren even to this day, and so it is with Flathorns, and so it will be with his children. And the Moose family never have forgotten and never can forget that there is nothing so foolish as pride in personal appearance.”

“Is that all?” asked Peter, as Grandfather Frog stopped.

“Isn’t that enough?” demanded Grandfather Frog testily. “Just think it over a while, and when you are tempted to be proud and haughty just remember the horns of Mr. Moose and what happened to them.”

“Thank you ever so much for the story,” replied Peter politely as he hopped away. Half way to the dear Old Briar-patch he paused. “It served old Mr. Moose just right!” he declared to no one in particular. And so it did.

Source:

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