

The Quarrelsome Mole

by Clara Dillingham Pierson

When the first hillock of fresh brown earth was thrown up in the edge of the Forest, the People who lived there said to each other. "Can it be that we have a new neighbor?"

Perhaps the Rabbits, the Ground Hogs, and the Snakes cared the most, for they also made their homes in the ground; yet even the Orioles wanted to know all about it. None of them had ever been acquainted with a Mole. They had seen the ridges in the meadows beneath which the Moles had their runways, and they knew that when the Moles were making these long streets under ground, they had to cut an opening through the grass once in a while and throw the loose earth out. This new mound in the forest looked exactly like those in the meadow, so they decided there must be a Mole in the neighborhood.

If that were so, somebody should call upon him and get acquainted; but how could they call? Mrs. Red Squirrel said: "Why can't some of you people who are so clever at digging, burrow down and find him?"

"Yes indeed," twittered the birds; "that is a good plan."

But Mr. Red Squirrel smiled at his wife and said: "I am afraid, Bushy-tail (that was his pet name for her) that none of our friends here could overtake the Mole. You know he is a very fast runner. If they were following they could never catch him."

"Let them burrow down ahead of the place where he is working, then," said she.

"And the Mole would turn and go another way, not knowing it was a friend looking for him."

"Well, why not make an opening into one of his runways and go into it, hunting until he is found?" said Mrs. Red Squirrel, who was like some other people in not wishing to give up her own ideas.

"Yes," cried a mischievous young Woodpecker; "let the Ground Hog go. You surely don't think him too fat?"

Now there was no denying that the Ground Hog was getting too stout to look well, and people thought he would be angry at this. Perhaps he was angry. The little Rabbits were sure of it. They said they knew by the expression of his tail. Still, you know, the Ground Hog came of a good family, and well-bred people do not say mean things even if they are annoyed. He combed the fur on his face with both paws, and answered with a polite bow: "If I had the slender and graceful form of my charming friend, Mrs. Red Squirrel, I should be delighted to do as she suggests."

That was really a very clever thing for Mr. Ground Hog to say. It was much more agreeable than if he had grunted out, "Much she knows about it! We burrowing people are all too large." And now Mrs. Red Squirrel was pleased and happy although her plan was not used.

That night Mrs. Ground Hog said to her husband: "I didn't know you admired Mrs. Red Squirrel

so much." And he answered: "Pooh! Admire her? She is a very good-looking person for one of her family, and I want to be polite to her for her husband's sake. He and I have business together. But for my part I prefer more flesh. I could never have married a slender wife, and I am pleased to see, my dear, that you are stouter than you were." And this also shows how clever a fellow Mr. Ground Hog was.

The very next night, as luck would have it, the Mole came out of his runway for a scamper on the grass. Mr. Ground Hog saw him and made his acquaintance. "We are glad to have you come," said he. "You will find it a pleasant neighborhood. People are very friendly."

"Well, I'm glad of that," answered the Mole. "I don't see any sense in people being disagreeable, myself, but in the meadow which I have just left there were the worst neighbors in the world. I stood it just as long as I could, and then I moved."

"I am sorry to hear that," said the Ground Hog, gently. "I had always supposed it a pleasant place to live in." He began to wonder what kind of fellow the Mole was. He did not like to hear him say such unkind things before a new acquaintance. Sometimes unpleasant things have to be said, but it was not so now.

"Umph!" said the Mole. "You have to live with people to know them. Of course, we Moles had no friends among the insects. We are always glad to meet them in the ground, but they do not seem so glad to meet us. That is easily understood when you remember what hungry people Moles are. Friendship is all very well, but when a fellow's stomach is empty, he can't let that stand in the way of a good dinner. There was no such reason why the Tree Frog or the Garter Snake should dislike me."

"Are you sure they did dislike you?"

"Certain of it. I remember how one night I wanted to talk with the Garter Snake, and asked him to come out of his hole for a visit in the moonlight. He wouldn't come."

"What did he say?" asked the Ground Hog.

"Not a word! And that was the worst of it. Think how provoking it was for me to stand there and call and call and not get any reply."

"Perhaps he was not at home," suggested the Ground Hog.

"That's what he said when I spoke to him. Said he was spending the night down by the river. As though I'd be likely to believe that! I guess he saw that he couldn't fool me, though, for after I told him what I thought of him he wriggled away without saying a word."

"Still he is not so disagreeable as the Tree Frog," said the Mole, after a pause in which the Ground Hog had been trying not to laugh. The Ground Hog said afterward that it was the funniest sight imaginable to see the stout little Mole scampering back and forth in the moonlight, and stopping every few minutes to scold about the Meadow People. The twitching of his tiny tail and the jerky motions of his large, pink-palmed digging hands, showed how angry he grew in thinking of them, and his pink snout fairly quivered with rage.

"I will tell you about the Tree Frog," said the Mole. "He is one of these fellows who are always

just so good-natured and polite. I can't endure them. I say it's putting on airs to act that way. I was telling him what I thought of the Garter Snake, and what should he do but draw himself up and say: 'Excuse me, but the Garter Snake is a particular friend of mine, and I do not care to hear him spoken of in that way.' I guess I taught him one good lesson, though. I told him he was just the kind of person I should expect the Garter Snake to like, and that I wished them much joy together, but that I didn't want anything to do with them.

"It was only a short time after this that I had such trouble about making my fort. Whenever I started to dig in a place I would find some other Mole there ahead of me."

"And then you would have to go somewhere else, of course?" said the Ground Hog.

"I'd like to know why!" said the Mole, with his glossy silver-brown fur on end. "No indeed! I had a perfect right to dig wherever I wished, and I would tell them so, and they would have to go elsewhere. One Mole was bad-tempered enough to say that he had as much right in the meadow as anybody, and I had to tussle with him and bite him many times before he saw his mistake.... They are disagreeable people over there,—but why are you going so soon? I thought we would have a good visit together."

"I promised to meet Mrs. Ground Hog," said her husband, "and must go. Good-night!" and he trotted away.

Not long afterward this highly respectable couple were feeding together in the moonlight. "What do you think of the Mole?" said she.

"Well,—er—ahem," answered her husband. "You know, my dear, that I do not like to talk against people, and I might better not tell you exactly what I think of him. He is a queer-looking fellow, and I always distrust anyone who will not look me in the eye. Perhaps that is not his fault, for the fur hides his eyes and he wears his ears inside of his head; but I must say that a fiercer or more disagreeable-looking snout I never saw. He has had trouble with all his old neighbors, and a fellow who cannot get along peaceably in one place will not in another. He is always talking about his rights and what he thinks——"

"You have told me enough," said Mrs. Ground Hog, interrupting him. "Nobody ever liked a person who insists on his 'rights' every time. And such a person never enjoys life. What a pity it is!" and she gave a sigh that shook her fat sides. "Now, I had it all planned that he should marry and set up housekeeping, and that I should have another pleasant neighbor soon."

"Ah! Mrs. Ground Hog," said her husband teasingly, "I knew you would be thinking of that. You are a born matchmaker. Now I think we could stand a few bachelors around here,—fine young fellows who have nothing to do but enjoy life." And his eyes twinkled as he said it.

"As though you did not enjoy life!" answered his wife. "Still, I could not wish any young Mole such a husband as this fellow. It is a great undertaking to marry a grumpy bachelor and teach him the happiness of living for others." And she looked very solemn.

"I suppose you found it so?" said Mr. Ground Hog, sidling up toward her.

"What a tease you are!" said his wife. "You know that I am happy." And really, of all the

couples on whom the moon looked that night, there was not a happier one than this pair of Ground Hogs; and there was not a lonelier or more miserable person than the Mole, who guarded his own rights and told people what he thought of them. But it is always so.

Source:

Pierson, Clara Dillingham. "The Quarrelsome Mole." *Among the Forest People*. New York: E.P. Dutton & Compnay, 1900. 163 – 174. Electronic.