

Mr. Toad's Old Suit

by Thornton W. Burgess

Peter Rabbit was tired and very sleepy as he hopped along the Crooked Little Path down the hill. He could see Old Mother West Wind just emptying her Merry Little Breezes out of her big bag onto the Green Meadows to play all the bright summer day. Peter Rabbit yawned and yawned again as he watched them dance over to the Smiling Pool. Then he hopped on down the Crooked Little Path towards home.

Sammy Jay, sitting on a fence post, saw him coming.

"Peter Rabbit out all night!
Oh my goodness what a sight!
Peter Rabbit, reprobate!
No good end will be your fate!"

shouted Sammy Jay.

Peter Rabbit ran out his tongue at Sammy Jay.

"Who stole Happy Jack's nuts? Thief! Thief! Thief!" shouted Peter Rabbit at Sammy Jay, and kept on down the Crooked Little Path.

It was true—Peter Rabbit had been out all night playing in the moonlight, stealing a midnight feast in Farmer Brown's cabbage patch and getting into mischief with Bobby Coon. Now when most of the little meadow people were just waking up Peter Rabbit was thinking of bed.

Presently he came to a big piece of bark which is the roof of Mr. Toad's house. Mr. Toad was sitting in his doorway blinking at jolly, round, red Mr. Sun, who had just begun to climb up the sky.

"Good morning, Mr. Toad," said Peter Rabbit.

"Good morning," said Mr. Toad.

"You're looking very fine this morning, Mr. Toad," said Peter Rabbit.

"I'm feeling very fine this morning," said Mr. Toad.

"Why, my gracious, you have on a new suit, Mr. Toad!" exclaimed Peter Rabbit.

"Well, what if I have, Peter Rabbit?" demanded Mr. Toad.

"Oh, nothing, nothing, nothing at all, Mr. Toad, nothing at all," said Peter Rabbit hastily, "only I didn't know you ever had a new suit. What have you done with your old suit, Mr. Toad?"

"Swallowed it," said Mr. Toad shortly, turning his back on Peter Rabbit.

And that was all Peter Rabbit could get out of Mr. Toad, so he started on down the Crooked Little Path. Now Peter Rabbit has a great deal of curiosity and is forever poking into other people's affairs. The more he thought about it the more he wondered what Mr. Toad could have done with his old suit. Of course he hadn't *swallowed* it! Who ever heard of such a thing! The more he thought of it the more Peter Rabbit felt that he must know what Mr. Toad had done with his old suit. By this time he had forgotten that he had been out all night. He had forgotten that he was sleepy. He had got to find out about Mr. Toad's old suit.

"I'll just run over to the Smiling Pool and ask Grandfather Frog. He'll surely know what Mr. Toad does with his old suits," said Peter Rabbit, and began to hop faster.

When he reached the Smiling Pool there sat Great-Grandfather Frog on his big green lily pad as usual. There was a hungry look in his big goggly eyes, for it was so early that no foolish, green flies had come his way yet. But Peter Rabbit was too full of curiosity in Mr. Toad's affairs to notice this.

"Good morning, Grandfather Frog," said Peter Rabbit.

"Good morning," replied Grandfather Frog a wee bit gruffly.

"You're looking very fine this morning, Grandfather Frog," said Peter Rabbit.

"Not so fine as I'd feel if I had a few fat, foolish, green flies," said Grandfather Frog.

"I've just met your cousin, Mr. Toad, and he has on a new suit," said Peter Rabbit.

"Indeed!" replied Grandfather Frog. "Well, I think it's high time."

"What does Mr. Toad do with his old suit, Grandfather Frog?" asked Peter Rabbit.

"Chug-a-rum! It's none of my business. Maybe he swallows it," replied Grandfather Frog crossly, and turned his back on Peter Rabbit.

Peter Rabbit saw that his curiosity must remain unsatisfied. He suddenly remembered that he had been out all night and was very, very sleepy, so he started off home across the Green Meadows.

Now the Merry Little Breezes had heard all that Peter Rabbit and Grandfather Frog had said, and they made up their minds that they would find out from Grandfather Frog what Mr. Toad really did do with his old suit. First of all they scattered over the Green Meadows. Presently back they all came, each blowing ahead of him a fat, foolish, green fly. Right over to the big green lily pad they blew the green flies.

"Chug-a-rum! Chug-a-rum! Chug-a-rum!" said Grandfather Frog, as each fat, foolish, green fly disappeared inside his white and yellow waistcoat. When the last one was out of sight, all but a leg which was left sticking out of a corner of Grandfather Frog's big mouth, one of the Merry Little Breezes ventured to ask him what became of Mr. Toad's old suit.

Grandfather Frog settled himself comfortably on the big green lily pad and folded his hands across his white and yellow waistcoat.

"Chug-a-rum," began Grandfather Frog. "Once upon a time—"

The Merry Little Breezes clapped their hands and settled themselves among the buttercups and daisies, for they knew that soon they would know what Mr. Toad did with his old suit.

"Once upon a time," began Grandfather Frog again, "when the world was young, old King Bear received word that old Mother Nature would visit the Green Meadows and the Green Forest. Of course old King Bear wanted his kingdom and his subjects to look their very best, so he issued a royal order that every one of the little meadow people and every one of the little forest folk should wear a new suit on the day that old Mother Nature was to pay her visit.

"Now like old King Bear, every one wanted to appear his very best before old Mother Nature, but as no one knew the exact day she was to come, every one began at once to wear his best suit, and to take the greatest care of it. Old King Bear appeared every day in a suit of glossy black. Lightfoot the Deer, threw away his dingy gray suit, and put on a coat of beautiful red and fawn. Mr. Mink, Mr. Otter, Mr. Muskrat, Mr. Rabbit, Mr. Woodchuck, Mr. Coon, who you know was first cousin to old King Bear, Mr. Gray Squirrel, Mr. Fox Squirrel, Mr. Red Squirrel, all put on brand new suits. Mr. Skunk changed his black and white stripes for a suit of all black, very handsome, very handsome indeed. Mr. Chipmunk took care to see that his new suit had the most beautiful stripes to be obtained.

"Mr. Jay, who was something of a dandy, had a wonderful new coat that looked for all the world as if it had been cut from the bluest patch of sky and trimmed with edging taken from the whitest clouds. Even Mr. Crow and Mr. Owl took pains to look their very best.

"But Mr. Toad couldn't see the need of such a fuss. He thought his neighbors spent altogether too much time and thought on dress. To be sure he was anxious to look his best when old Mother Nature came, so he got a new suit all ready. But Mr. Toad couldn't afford to sit around in idleness admiring his new clothes. No indeed! Mr. Toad had too much to do. He was altogether too busy. He had a large garden to take care of, had Mr. Toad, and work in a garden is very hard on clothes. So Mr. Toad just wore his old suit over his new one and went on about his business.

"By and by the great day came when old Mother Nature arrived to inspect the kingdom of old King Bear. All the little meadow people and all the little forest folk hastened to pay their respects to old Mother Nature and to strut about in their fine clothes—all but Mr. Toad. He was so busy that he didn't even know that old Mother Nature had arrived.

"Late in the afternoon, Mr. Toad stopped to rest. He had just cleared his cabbage patch of the slugs which threatened to eat up his crop and he was very tired. Presently he happened to look up the road, and who should he see but old Mother Nature herself coming to visit his garden and to find out why Mr. Toad had not been to pay her his respects.

"Suddenly Mr. Toad remembered that he had on his working clothes, which were very old, very dirty and very ragged. For just a minute he didn't know what to do. Then he dived under a cabbage leaf and began to pull off his old suit. But the old suit stuck! He was in such a hurry and so excited that he couldn't find the buttons. Finally he got his trousers off. Then he reached over and got hold of the back of his coat and tugged and hauled until finally he pulled his old coat off right over his head just as if it were a shirt.

"Mr. Toad gave a great sigh of relief as he stepped out in his new suit, for you remember that he

had been wearing that new suit underneath the old one all the time.

"Mr. Toad was very well pleased with himself until he thought how terribly untidy that ragged old suit looked lying on the ground. What should he do with it? He couldn't hide it in the garden, for old Mother Nature's eyes are so sharp that she would be sure to see it. What should he do?

"Then Mr. Toad had a happy thought. Every one made fun of his big mouth. But what was a big mouth for if not to use? He would swallow his old suit! In a flash Mr. Toad dived under the cabbage leaf and crammed his old suit into his mouth.

"When old Mother Nature came into the garden, Mr. Toad was waiting in the path to receive her. Very fine he looked in his new suit and you would have thought he had been waiting all day to receive old Mother Nature, but for one thing—swallow as much and as hard as he would, he couldn't get down quite all of his old suit, and a leg of his trousers hung out of a corner of his big mouth.

"Of course old Mother Nature saw it right away. And how she did laugh! And of course Mr. Toad felt very much mortified. But Mother Nature was so pleased with Mr. Toad's garden and with Mr. Toad's industry that she quite overlooked the ragged trousers leg hanging from the corner of Mr. Toad's mouth.

"'Fine clothes are not to be compared with fine work,' said old Mother Nature. 'I herewith appoint you my chief gardener, Mr. Toad. And as a sign that all may know that this is so, hereafter you shall always swallow your old suit whenever you change your clothes!'

"And from that day to this the toads have been the very best of gardeners. And in memory of their great, great, great-grandfather a thousand times removed they have always swallowed their old suits.

"Now you know what my cousin, old Mr. Toad, did with his old suit just before Peter Rabbit passed his house this morning," concluded Great-Grandfather Frog.

"Oh," cried the Merry Little Breezes, "thank you, thank you, Grandfather Frog!"

Then they raced away across the Green Meadows and up the Crooked Little Path to see if old Mr. Toad was gardening. And Peter Rabbit still wonders what old Mr. Toad did with his old suit.

Source:

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