

Johnny Chuck Finds a Use for His Back Door

by Thornton W. Burgess

Johnny Chuck sat in his doorway looking over the Green Meadows. He felt very fine. He had had a good breakfast in the sweet-clover patch. He had had a good nap on his own doorstep. By and by he saw the Merry Little Breezes of old Mother West Wind hurrying in his direction. They seemed in a very great hurry. They didn't stop to kiss the buttercups or tease the daisies. Johnny pricked up his small ears and watched them hurry up the hill.

"Good morning, Johnny Chuck," panted the first Merry Little Breeze to reach him, "have you heard the news?"

"What news?" asked Johnny Chuck.

"The news about old Mother Chuck," replied the Merry Little Breezes.

Johnny shook his head.

"No," said he. "What is it?"

The Merry Little Breezes grew very, very sober.

"It is bad news," they replied.

"What is it? Tell me quick!" begged Johnny.

Just then Reddy Fox came hopping and skipping down the Lone Little Path.

"Hi, Johnny Chuck, have you heard the news?"

"No," said Johnny Chuck, "do tell me quick!"

Reddy Fox grinned maliciously, for Reddy likes to torment others. "It's about old Mrs. Chuck," said Reddy.

"I know that already," replied Johnny, "but, please, what is it?"

"Farmer Brown's boy has caught old Mrs. Chuck, and now I wouldn't wonder but what he will come up here and catch you," replied Reddy, turning a somersault.

Johnny Chuck grew pale. He had not seen Mother Chuck to speak to since he ran away from home. Now he was glad that he had run away, and yet sorry, oh, so sorry that anything had happened to Mrs. Chuck. Two big tears came into his eyes and ran down his funny little black nose. The Merry Little Breezes saw this, and one of them hurried over and whispered in Johnny Chuck's ear.

"Don't cry, Johnny Chuck," whispered the Merry Little Breeze. "Old Mother Chuck got away, and Farmer Brown's boy is still wondering how she did it."

Johnny's heart gave a great throb of relief. "I don't believe that Farmer Brown's boy will catch me," said Johnny Chuck, "for my house has two back doors."

Johnny Chuck awoke very early the next morning. He stretched and yawned and then just lay quietly enjoying himself for a few minutes. His bedchamber, way down underground, was snug and warm and very, very comfortable. By and by, Johnny Chuck heard a noise up by his front door.

"I wonder what is going on out there," said Johnny Chuck to himself, and jumping up, he tiptoed softly up the long hall until he had almost reached his doorway. Then he heard a voice which he had heard before, and it made little shivers run all over him. It was the voice of Granny Fox.

"So this is where that fat little Chuck has made his home," said Granny Fox.

"Yes," replied another voice, "this is where Johnny Chuck lives, for I saw him here yesterday."

Johnny pricked up his ears, for that was the voice of Reddy Fox.

"Do you think he is in here now?" inquired Granny Fox.

"I am sure of it," replied Reddy, "for I have been watching ever since jolly, round, red Mr. Sun threw his nightcap off this morning, and Johnny Chuck has not put his nose out yet."

"Good," said Granny Fox, "I think fat Chuck will taste good for breakfast."

Johnny felt the cold shivers run over him again as he heard Granny Fox and Reddy Fox smack their lips. Then Granny Fox spoke again:

"You lie down behind that bunch of grass over there, Reddy, and I will lie down behind the old apple-tree. When he comes out, you just jump into his doorway and I will catch him before he can say Jack Robinson."

Johnny waited and listened and listened, but all was as still as still could be. Then Johnny Chuck tiptoed back along the hall to his bedroom and sat down to think. He felt sure that Granny Fox and Reddy were waiting for him, just as he had heard them plan.

"However am I going to know when they leave?" said Johnny Chuck to himself. Then he remembered the back doors which he had taken such care to make, and which Peter Rabbit had laughed at him for taking the trouble to make. He had hidden one so cunningly in the long grass and had so carefully removed all sand from around it that he felt quite sure that no one had found it.

Very softly Johnny Chuck crept along the back passageway. Very, very cautiously he stuck his little black nose out the doorway and sniffed. Yes, he could smell foxes, but he knew that they were not at his back door. Little by little he crept out until he could peep through the grass. There lay Reddy Fox behind a big clump of grass, his eyes fixed on Johnny Chuck's front door, and there behind the apple-tree lay Granny Fox taking her ease, but all ready to jump when Reddy should give the word. Johnny Chuck almost giggled out loud as he saw how eagerly Reddy Fox was watching for him. Then Johnny Chuck had an idea that made him giggle harder. His black eyes snapped and he chuckled to himself.

Pretty soon along came Bumble the Bee, looking for honey. He came bustling and humming through the tall grass and settled on a dandelion right on the doorstep of Johnny Chuck's back door.

"Good morning," grumbled Bumble the Bee.

Johnny put a hand on his lips and beckoned Bumble to come inside.

Now Bumble the Bee is a gruff and rough fellow, but he is a good fellow, too, when you know him. Johnny Chuck had many times told him of places where the flowers grew thick and sweet, so when Johnny beckoned to him, Bumble came at once.

"Will you do something for me, Bumble?" whispered Johnny Chuck.

"Of course, I will," replied Bumble, in his gruff voice. "What is it?"

Then Johnny Chuck told Bumble the Bee how Granny and Reddy Fox were waiting for him to come out for his breakfast and how they had planned to gobble him up for their own breakfast. Bumble the Bee grew very indignant.

"What do you want me to do, Johnny Chuck?" he asked. "If I can help you, just tell me how."

Johnny whispered something to Bumble the Bee, and Bumble laughed right out loud. Then he buzzed up out of the doorway, and Johnny crept up to watch. Straight over to where Reddy Fox was squatting behind the clump of grass flew Bumble the Bee, so swiftly that Johnny could hardly see him. Suddenly Reddy gave a yelp and sprang into the air. Johnny Chuck clapped both hands over his mouth to keep from laughing out loud, for you see Bumble the Bee had stuck his sharp little lance into one of the ears of Reddy Fox.

Granny Fox looked up and scowled. "Keep still," she whispered.

Just then Reddy yelped louder than before, for Bumble had stung him in the other ear.

"What's the matter?" snapped Granny Fox.

"I don't know," cried Reddy Fox, hanging on to both ears.

"You are—" began Granny Fox, but Johnny Chuck never knew what she was going to say. Reddy Fox was, for you see just then Bumble the Bee thrust his sharp little lance into one of her ears, and before she could turn around he had done the same thing to the other ear.

Granny Fox didn't wait for any more. She started off as fast as she could go, with Reddy Fox after her, and every few steps they rubbed their ears and shook their heads as if they thought they could shake out the pain.

Source:

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