

How Sammy Jay Was Found Out

by Thornton W. Burgess

Sammy Jay was very busy, very busy indeed. When anyone happened that way Sammy Jay pretended to be doing nothing at all, for Sammy Jay thought himself a very fine gentleman. He was very proud of his handsome blue coat with white trimmings and his high cap, and he would sit on a fence post and make fun of Johnny Chuck working at a new door for his snug little home in the Green Meadows, and of Striped Chipmunk storing up heaps of corn and nuts for the winter, for most of the time Sammy Jay was an idle fellow. And when Sammy Jay WAS busy, he was pretty sure to be doing something that he ought not to do, for idle people almost always get into mischief.

Sammy Jay was in mischief now, and that is why he pretended to be doing nothing when he thought any one was looking.

Old Mother West Wind had come down from her home behind the Purple Hills very early that morning. Indeed, jolly, round, red Mr. Sun had hardly gotten out of bed when she crossed the Green Meadows on her way to help the big ships across the ocean. Old Mother West Wind's eyes were sharp, and she saw Sammy Jay before Sammy Jay saw her.

"Now what can Sammy Jay be so busy about, and why is he so very, very quiet?" thought Old Mother West Wind. "He must be up to some mischief."

So when she opened her big bag and turned out all her Merry Little Breezes to play on the Green Meadows she sent one of them to see what Sammy Jay was doing in the old chestnut tree. The Merry Little Breeze danced along over the tree tops just as if he hadn't a thought in the world but to wake up all the little leaves and set them to dancing too, and Sammy Jay, watching Old Mother West Wind and the other Merry Little Breezes, didn't see this Merry Little Breeze at all.

Pretty soon it danced back to Old Mother West Wind and whispered in her ear: "Sammy Jay is stealing the nuts Happy Jack Squirrel had hidden in the hollow of the old chestnut tree, and is hiding them for himself in the tumble down nest that Blacky the Crow built in the Great Pine last year." "Aha!" said Old Mother West Wind. Then she went on across the Green Meadows.

"Good morning, Old Mother West Wind," said Sammy Jay as she passed the fence post where he was sitting.

"Good morning, Sammy Jay," said Old Mother West Wind. "What brings you out so early in the morning?"

"I'm out for my health, Old Mother West Wind," said Sammy Jay politely. "The doctor has ordered me to take a bath in the dew at sunrise every morning."

Old Mother West Wind said nothing, but went on her way across the Green Meadows to blow the ships across the ocean. When she had passed, Sammy Jay hurried to take the last of Happy Jack's nuts to the old nest in the Great Pine.

Poor Happy Jack! Soon he came dancing along with another nut to put in the hollow of the old

chestnut tree. When he peeped in and saw that all his big store of nuts had disappeared, he couldn't believe his own eyes. He put in one paw and felt all around but not a nut could he feel. Then he climbed in and sure enough, the hollow was empty.

Poor Happy Jack! There were tears in his eyes when he crept out again. He looked all around but no one was to be seen but handsome Sammy Jay, very busy brushing his beautiful blue coat.

“Good morning, Sammy Jay, have you seen any one pass this way?” asked Happy Jack. “Some one has stolen a store of nuts from the hollow in the old chestnut tree.”

Sammy Jay pretended to feel very badly indeed, and in his sweetest voice, for his voice was very sweet in those days, he offered to help Happy Jack try to catch the thief who had stolen the store of nuts from the hollow in the old chestnut tree.

Together they went down cross the Green Meadows asking every one whom they met if they had seen the thief who had stolen Happy Jack's store of nuts from the hollow in the old chestnut tree. All the Merry Little Breezes joined in the search, and soon every one who lived in the Green Meadows or in the wood knew that some one had stolen all of Happy Jack Squirrel's store of nuts from the hollow in the old chestnut tree. And because every one liked Happy Jack, every one felt very sorry indeed for him.

The next morning all the Merry Little Breezes of Old Mother West Wind were turned out of the big bag into the Green Meadows very early indeed, for they had a lot of errands to do. All over the Green Meadows they hurried, all through the wood, up and down the Laughing Brook and all around the Smiling Pool, inviting everybody to meet at the Great Pine on the hill at nine o'clock to form a committee of the whole—to try to find the thief who stole Happy Jack's nuts from the hollow in the old chestnut tree.

And because every one liked Happy Jack every one went to the Great Pine on the hill—Reddy Fox, Bobby Coon, Jimmy Skunk Striped Chipmunk, who is Happy Jack's cousin you know, Billy Mink, Little Joe Otter, Jerry Muskrat, Hooty the Owl, who was almost too sleepy to keep his eyes open, Blacky the Crow, Johnny Chuck, Peter Rabbit, even old Grandfather Frog. Of course Sammy Jay was there, looking his handsomest.

When they had all gathered around the Great Pine, Old Mother West Wind pointed to the old nest way up in the top of it. “Is that your nest?” she asked Blacky the Crow.

“It was, but I gave it to my cousin, Sammy Jay,” said Blacky the Crow.

“Is that your nest, and may I have a stick out of it?” asked Old Mother West Wind of Sammy Jay.

“It is,” said Sammy Jay, with his politest bow, “And you are welcome to a stick out of it.” To himself he thought, “She will only take one from the top and that won't matter.”

Old Mother West Wind suddenly puffed out her cheeks and blew so hard that she blew a big stick right out of the bottom of the old nest. Down it fell bumpity-bump on the branches of the Great Pine. After it fell—what do you think? Why, hickory nuts and chestnuts and acorns and hazel nuts, such a lot of them!

“Why! Why—e—e!” cried Happy Jack. “There are all my stolen nuts!”

Everybody turned to look at Sammy Jay, but he was flying off through the wood as fast as he could go. “Stop thief!” cried Old Mother West Wind. “Stop thief!” cried all the Merry Little Breezes and Johnny Chuck and Billy Mink and all the rest. But Sammy Jay didn't stop.

Then all began to pick up the nuts that had fallen from the old nest where Sammy Jay had hidden them. By and by, with Happy Jack leading the way, they all marched back to the old chestnut tree and there Happy Jack stored all the nuts away in his snug little hollow once more.

And ever since that day, Sammy Jay, whenever he tries to call, just screams: “Thief!” “Thief!” “Thief!”

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