

Why Flitter the Bat Flies at Night

by Thornton W. Burgess

Flitter the Bat made Peter Rabbit's head dizzy. Peter couldn't help watching him. He just had to. It seemed so wonderful that Flitter could really fly, that whenever he saw him, Peter had to stop and watch. And then, as he saw Flitter twist and turn, fly high, fly low, and go round and round, Peter's head would begin to swim and grow dizzy, and he wondered and wondered how it was that Flitter himself didn't grow dizzy.

"It must be fine to fly," thought Peter. "I wish I could fly. If I could, I wouldn't spend all my time flying around the way Flitter does. I'd go on long journeys and see the Great World. I'd fly way, way up in the blue, blue sky, the way Ol' Mistah Buzzard does, where I could look down and see all that is going on in the Green Forest and on the Green Meadows. And I'd fly in the daytime, because there is more going on then. I wonder, now, why it is that Flitter never comes out until after jolly, round, red Mr. Sun has gone to bed behind the Purple Hills. I never see him in the daytime, and I don't even know where he keeps himself. I never thought of it before, but I wonder why it is that he flies only at night. I believe I'll ask Grandfather Frog the very next time I see him."

Now you know that once Peter Rabbit's curiosity is aroused, it just has to be satisfied. No sooner did he begin to wonder about Flitter the Bat than he could think of nothing else. So he watched until the way was clear, and then he started for the Smiling Pool as fast as he could go, lipperty-lipperty-lip. He hoped he would find Grandfather Frog sitting as usual on his big green lily-pad, and that he would be good-natured. If he wasn't feeling good-natured, it would be of no use to ask him for a story.

When Peter reached the Smiling Pool he was disappointed, terribly disappointed. The big green lily-pad was there, but there was no one sitting on it. Somehow the Smiling Pool didn't seem quite like itself without Grandfather Frog sitting there watching for foolish green flies. Peter's face showed just how disappointed he felt. He was just going to turn away when a great, deep voice said:

"Chug-a-rum! Where are your manners, Peter Rabbit, that you forget to speak to your elders?"

Peter stared eagerly into the Smiling Pool, and presently he saw two great, goggly eyes and the top of a green head, way out almost in the middle of the Smiling Pool. It was Grandfather Frog himself, having his morning swim.

"Oh, Grandfather Frog, I didn't see you at all!" cried Peter, "If I had, of course I would have spoken. The fact is, I—I—"

"You want a story," finished Grandfather Frog for him. "You can't fool me, Peter Rabbit. You came over here just to ask me for a story. I know you, Peter! I know you! Well, what is it this time?"

"If you please," replied Peter politely and happily, for he saw that Grandfather Frog was feeling good-natured, "why is it that Flitter the Bat flies only at night?"

Grandfather Frog climbed out on his big green lily-pad and made himself comfortable. Peter sat still and tried not to show how impatient he felt. Grandfather Frog took his time. It tickled him to see

how hard impatient Peter was trying to be patient, and his big, goggly eyes twinkled.

"Chug-a-rum!" said he at last, with a suddenness that made Peter jump. "That's very good, Peter, very good indeed! Now I'll tell you the story."

Of course he meant that Peter's effort to keep still was very good, but Peter didn't know this, and he couldn't imagine what Grandfather Frog meant. However, what he cared most about was the story, so he settled himself to listen, his long ears standing straight up, and his eyes stretched wide open as he watched Grandfather Frog. The latter cleared his throat two or three times, each time as if he intended to begin right then. It was one of Grandfather Frog's little jokes. He did it just to tease Peter. At last he really did begin, and the very first thing he did was to ask Peter a question.

"What is the reason that you stay in the dear Old Briar-patch when Reddy Fox is around?"

"So that he won't catch me, of course," replied Peter.

"Very good," said Grandfather Frog. "Now, why do you go over to the sweet-clover patch every day?"

"Why, because there is plenty to eat there," replied Peter, looking very, very much puzzled.

"Well, now you've answered your own question," grunted Grandfather Frog. "Flitter flies at night because he is safest then, and because he can find plenty to eat."

"Oh," said Peter, and his voice sounded dreadfully disappointed. He had found out what he had wanted to know, but he hadn't had a story. He fidgeted about and looked very hard at Grandfather Frog, but the latter seemed to think that he had told Peter what he wanted to know, and that was all there was to it. Finally Peter sighed, and it was such a heavy sigh! Then very slowly he turned his back on the Smiling Pool and started to hop away.

"Chug-a-rum!" said Grandfather Frog in his deepest, story-telling voice. "A long time ago when the world was young, the great-great-ever-so-great grandfather of Flitter the Bat first learned to fly."

"I know!" cried Peter eagerly. "You told me about that, and it was a splendid story."

"But when he learned to fly, he found that Old Mother Nature never gives all her blessings to any single one of her little people," continued Grandfather Frog, without paying the least attention to Peter's interruption. "Old Mr. Bat had wings; something no other animal had, but he found that he could no longer run and jump. He could just flop about on the ground, and was almost helpless. Of course that meant that he could very easily be caught, and so the ground was no longer a safe place for him. But he soon found that he was not safe in the air in daytime. Old Mr. Hawk could fly even faster than he, and Mr. Hawk was always watching for him. At first, Mr. Bat didn't know what to do. He didn't like to go to Old Mother Nature and complain that his new wings were not all that he had thought they would be. That would look as if he were ungrateful for her kindness in giving him the wings.

"'I've got to think of some way out of my troubles myself,' thought old Mr. Bat. 'When I'm sure that I can't, it will be time enough to go to Old Mother Nature.'

"Now of course it is very hard to think when you are twisting and dodging and turning in the

air."

"Of course!" said Peter Rabbit, just as if he knew all about it.

"So Mr. Bat went looking for a place where he could be quiet all by himself and think without danger of being gobbled up for some one's dinner," continued Grandfather Frog. "He flew and he flew and had almost given up hope of finding any such place when he saw a cave. It looked very black inside, but it was big enough for Mr. Bat to fly into, and in he went. He knew that Mr. Hawk would never come in there, and when he found a little shelf up near the roof, he knew that he was safe from any four-footed enemies who might follow him there. It was just the place to rest and think. So he rested, and while he rested, he thought and thought.

"By and by he noticed that it was growing dark outside. 'My goodness! If I am going to get anything to eat to-day, I shall have to hurry,' thought he. When he got outside, he found that Mr. Sun had gone to bed. So had all the birds, except Mr. Owl and Mr. Nighthawk. Now Mr. Nighthawk doesn't belong to the Hawk family at all, so there was nothing to fear from him. Then Mr. Bat had a very pleasant surprise. He found the air full of insects, ever so many more than in the daytime. By being very smart and quick he caught a few before it was too dark for him to see. They didn't fill his stomach, but they kept him from starving. As he flew back to the cave, a great idea came to him, the idea for which he had been thinking so hard. He would sleep days in the cave, where he was perfectly safe, and come out to hunt bugs and insects just as soon as Mr. Hawk had gone to bed! Then he would be safe and would not have to complain to Old Mother Nature.

"At first old Mr. Bat, who wasn't old then, you know, had hard work to catch enough insects before it grew too dark, but he found that every night he could see a little longer and a little better than the night before, until by and by he could see as well in the dusk as he used to see in the daytime. Then he realized that Old Mother Nature had once more been very good to him, and that she had helped him just as she always helps those who help themselves. She had given him night-seeing eyes, and he no more had to go hungry.

"Mr. Bat was very grateful, and from that day to this, Bats have been content to live in caves and fly in the evening. You ask Flitter if it isn't so."

Peter grinned. "He never stays in one place long enough for me to ask him anything," said he. "I'm ever so much obliged for the story, Grandfather Frog. It pays to make the best of what we have, doesn't it?"

"It certainly does. Chug-a-rum! It certainly does!" replied Grandfather Frog.

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