

Digger and His Cousin Glutton

by Thornton W. Burgess

“Well, Peter,” said Old Mother Nature, “did you visit Digger the Badger yesterday?”

“Yes'm,” replied Peter, “I visited him, but I didn't find out much. He's a regular old grouch. He isn't the least bit neighborly. It took me a long time to find him. He has more holes than anybody I ever knew, and I couldn't tell which one is his home. When I did find him, he gave me a terrible scare. I didn't see him until I was right on top of him, and if I hadn't jumped, and jumped quickly, I guess I wouldn't be here this morning. He was lying flat down in the grass and he was so very flat that I just didn't see him. When I told him that I wanted to know all about him and his ways, he replied that it was none of my business how he lived or what he did, and that was all I could get out of him.

“I sat around awhile and watched him, but he didn't do much except take a sun bath. He certainly is a queer-looking fellow to be a member of the Weasel family. There's nothing about him that looks like a Weasel, that I could see. Of course, he isn't as broad as he is long, but he looks almost that when he is lying flat down and that long hair of his is spread out on both sides. He really has a handsome coat when you come to look at it. It is silvery gray and silky looking. It seems to be parted right down the middle of his back. His tail is rather short, but stout and hairy. His head and face are really handsome. His cheeks, chin and a broad stripe from his nose right straight back over his head are white. On each cheek is a bar of black. The back part of each ear is black, and so are his feet. He has rather a sharp nose. Somehow when he is walking he makes me think of a little, flattened-out Bear with very short legs. And such claws as he has on his front feet! I don't know any one with such big strong claws for his size. I guess that must be because he is such a digger.”

“That's a very good guess, Peter,” said Old Mother Nature. “Has any one here ever seen him dig?”

“I did once,” replied Peter. “I happened to be over near where he lives when Farmer Brown's boy came along and surprised Digger some distance from one of his holes. Digger didn't try to get to one of those holes; he simply began to dig. My gracious, how the sand did fly! He was out of sight in the ground before Farmer Brown's boy could get to him. Johnny Chuck is pretty good at digging, but he simply isn't in the same class with Digger the Badger. No one is that I know of, unless it is Miner the Mole. I guess this is all I know about him, excepting that he is a great fighter. Once I saw him whip a dog almost twice his size. I never heard such hissing and snarling and growling. He wouldn't tell me anything about how he lives.”

“Very good, Peter, very good,” replied Old Mother Nature, “That's as much as I expected you would be able to find out. Digger is a queer fellow. His home is on the great plains and in the flat, open country of the Middle West and Far West, where Gophers and Ground Squirrels and Prairie Dogs live. They furnish him with the greater part of his food. All of them are good diggers, but they don't stand any chance when he sets out to dig them out.

“Digger spends most of his time under ground during daylight, seldom coming out except for a sun bath. But as soon as jolly, round, red Mr. Sun goes to bed for the night, Digger appears and travels about in search of a dinner. His legs are so short and he is so stout and heavy that he is slow and rather clumsy, but he makes up for that by his ability to dig. He doesn't expect to catch any one on the surface, unless he happens to surprise a Meadow Mouse within jumping distance. He goes hunting for the holes

of Ground Squirrels and other burrowers, and when he finds one promptly digs. He eats Grasshoppers, Beetles and small Snakes, as well as such small animals as he catches. It was well for you, Peter, that you jumped when you did, for I suspect that Digger would have enjoyed a Rabbit dinner.

“Very little is known of Digger's family life, but he is a good husband. In winter he sleeps as Johnny Chuck does, coming out soon after the snow disappears in the spring. Of all my little people, none has greater courage. When he is cornered he will fight as long as there is a breath of life in him. His skin is very tough and he is further protected by his long hair. His teeth are sharp and strong and he can always give a good account of himself in a fight. He is afraid of no one of his own size.

“Man hunts him for his fur, but man is very stupid in many things and this is an example. You see, Digger is worth a great deal more alive than dead, because of the great number of destructive Rodents he kills. The only thing that can be brought against him is the number of holes he digs. Mr. and Mrs. Digger have two to five babies late in the spring or early in the summer. They are born under ground in a nest of grass. As you may guess just by looking at Digger, he is very strong. If he once gets well into the ground, a strong man pulling on his tail cannot budge him. As Peter has pointed out, he isn't at all sociable. Mr. and Mrs. Digger are quite satisfied to live by themselves and be left alone. So he is rarely seen in daytime, but probably is out oftener than is supposed. Peter has told how he nearly stepped on Digger before seeing him. It is Digger's wise habit to lie perfectly still until he is sure he has been seen, so people often pass him without seeing him at all, or if they see him they take him for a stone.

“While Digger the Badger is a lover of the open country and doesn't like the Green Forest at all he has a cousin who is found only in the Green Forest and usually very deep in the Green Forest at that. This is Glutton the Wolverine, the largest and ugliest member of the family. None of you have seen him, because he lives almost wholly in the great forests of the North. He hasn't a single friend that I know of, but that doesn't trouble him in the least.

“Glutton has several names. He is called 'Carcajou' in the Far North, and out in the Far West is often called 'Skunkbear.' The latter name probably is given him because in shape and color he looks a good deal as though he might be half Skunk and half Bear. He is about three feet long with a tail six inches long, and is thickset and heavy. His legs are short and very stout. His hair, including that on the tail, is long and shaggy. It is blackish-brown, becoming grayish on the upper part of his head and cheeks. His feet are black. When he walks he puts his feet flat on the ground as a Bear does.

“Being so short of leg and heavy of body, he is slow in his movements. But what he lacks in this respect he makes up in strength and cunning. You think Reddy Fox and Old Man Coyote are smart, but neither begins to be as smart as Glutton the Wolverine. He is a great traveler, and in the Far North where the greater part of the fur of the world is trapped, he is a pest to the trappers. He will follow a trapper all day long, keeping just out of sight. No matter how carefully a trapper hides a trap, Glutton will find it and steal the bait without getting caught. Sometimes he even tears up the traps and takes them off and hides them in the woods. If he comes on a trap in which some other animal has been caught, he will eat the animal. His strength is so great that often he will tear his way into the cabins of hunters while they are absent and then eat or destroy all their food. His appetite is tremendous, and it is because of this that he is called Glutton. What he cannot eat or take away, he covers with filth so that no other animal will touch it. He is of ugly disposition and is hated alike by the animals and by man. His fur is of considerable value, but he is hunted more for the purpose of getting rid of him than for his fur. Sometimes when caught in a trap he will pick it up and carry it for miles.

“Mrs. Glutton has two or three babies in the spring. They live in a cave, but if a cave cannot be found,

they use a hole in the ground which Mrs. Glutton digs. It is usually well hidden and seldom has been found by man. Glutton will eat any kind of flesh and seems not to care whether it be freshly killed or so old that it is decayed. The only way that hunters can protect their supplies is by covering them with great logs. Even then Glutton will often tear the logs apart to get at the supplies. Because of his great cunning, the Indians think he is possessed of an evil spirit.

“I think this will do for to-day. To-morrow we will take up another branch of the family, some members of which all of you know. I wonder if it wouldn't be a good plan to have Shadow the Weasel here.”

Such a look of dismay as swept over the faces of all those little people, with the exception of Jimmy Skunk and Prickly Porky! “If— if—if you please, I don't think I'll come to-morrow morning,” said Danny Meadow Mouse.

“I—I—I think I shall be too busy at home and will have to miss that lesson,” said Striped Chipmunk.

Old Mother Nature smiled. “Don't worry, little folks,” said she. “You ought to know that if I had Shadow here I wouldn't let him hurt one of you. But I am afraid if he were here you would pay no attention to me, so I promise you that Shadow will not be anywhere near.”

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