

Why Spotty the Turtle Carries His House With Him.

by Thornton W. Burgess

Spotty the Turtle sat on an old log on the bank of the Smiling Pool, taking a sun-bath. He had sat that way for the longest time without once moving. Peter Rabbit had seen him when he went by on his way to the Laughing Brook and the Green Forest to look for some one to pass the time of day with. Spotty was still there when Peter returned a long time after, and he didn't look as if he had moved. A sudden thought struck Peter. He couldn't remember that he ever had seen Spotty's house. He had seen the houses of most of his other friends, but think as hard as ever he could, he didn't remember having seen Spotty's.

"Hi, Spotty!" he shouted. "Where do you live?"

Spotty slowly turned his head and looked up at Peter. There was a twinkle in his eyes, though Peter didn't see it.

"Right here in the Smiling Pool. Where else should I live?" he replied.

"I mean, where is your house?" returned Peter. "Of course I know you live in the Smiling Pool, but where is your house? Is it in the bank or down under water?"

"It is just wherever I happen to be. Just now it is right here," said Spotty. "I always take it with me wherever I go; I find it much the handiest way."

With that Spotty disappeared. That is to say, his head and legs and tail disappeared. Peter stared very hard. Then he began to laugh, for it came to him that what Spotty had said was true. His house was with him, and now he had simply retired inside. He didn't need any other house than just that hard, spotted shell, inside of which he was now so cosily tucked away.

"That's a great idea! Ho, ho, ho! That's a great idea!" shouted Peter.

"Of course it is," replied Spotty, putting nothing but his head out, "You will always find me at home whenever you call, Peter, and that is more than you can say of most other people."

All the way to his own home in the dear Old Briar-patch, Peter thought about Spotty and how queer it was that he should carry his house around with him.

"I wonder how it happens that he does it," thought he. "No wonder he is so slow. Of course, it is very handy to have his house always with him. As he says, he is always at home. Still, when he is in a hurry to get away from an enemy, it must be very awkward to have to carry his house on his back. I—I—why, how stupid of me! He doesn't have to run away at all! All he has got to do is to go inside his house and stay there until the danger is past! I never thought of that before. Why, that is the handiest thing I ever heard of."

Now Peter knew that there must be a good story about Spotty and his house, and you know Peter dearly loves a good story. So at the very first opportunity the next day, he hurried over to the Smiling Pool to ask Grandfather Frog about it. As usual, Grandfather Frog was sitting on his big green lily-pad. No

sooner did Peter pop his head above the edge of the bank of the Smiling Pool than Grandfather Frog exclaimed:

"Chug-a-rum! You've kept me waiting a long time, Peter Rabbit. I don't like to be kept waiting. If you wanted to know about Spotty the Turtle, why didn't you come earlier?" All the time there was a twinkle in the big, goggly eyes of Grandfather Frog.

Peter was so surprised that he couldn't find his tongue. He hadn't said a word to any one about Spotty, so how could Grandfather Frog know what he had come for? For a long time he had had a great deal of respect for Grandfather Frog, who, as you know, is very old and very wise, but now Peter felt almost afraid of him. You see, it seemed to Peter as if Grandfather Frog had read his very thoughts.

"I—I didn't know you were waiting. Truly I didn't," stammered Peter. "If I had, I would have been here long ago. If you please, how did you know that I was coming and what I was coming for?"

"Never mind how I knew. I know a great deal that I don't tell, which is more than some folks can say," replied Grandfather Frog.

Peter wondered if he meant him, for you know Peter is a great gossip. But he didn't say anything, because he didn't know just what to say, and in a minute Grandfather Frog began the story Peter so much wanted.

"Of course you know, without me telling you, that there is a reason for Spotty's carrying his house around with him, because there is a reason for everything in this world. And of course you know that that reason is because of something that happened a long time ago, way back in the days when the world was young. Almost everything to-day is the result of things that happened in those long-ago days. The great-great-ever-so-great grandfather of Spotty the Turtle lived then, and unlike Spotty, whom you know, he had no house. He was very quiet and bashful, was Mr. Turtle, and he never meddled with any one's business, because he believed that the best way of keeping out of trouble was to attend strictly to his own affairs.

"He was a good deal like Spotty, just as fond of the water and just as slow moving, but he didn't have the house which Spotty has now. If he had had, he would have been saved a great deal of trouble and worry. For a long time everybody lived at peace with everybody else. Then came the trying time, of which you already know, when those who lived on the Green Meadows and in the Green Forest had the very hardest kind of work to find enough to eat, and were hungry most of the time. Now Mr. Turtle, living in the Smiling Pool, had plenty to eat. He had nothing to worry about on that score. Everybody who lives in the Smiling Pool knows that it is the best place in the world, anyway."

Grandfather Frog winked at Jerry Muskrat, who was listening, and Jerry nodded his head.

"But presently Mr. Turtle discovered that the big people were eating the little people whenever they could catch them, and that he wasn't safe a minute when on shore, and not always safe in the water," continued Grandfather Frog. "He had two or three very narrow escapes, and these set him to thinking. He was too slow and awkward to run or to fight. The only thing he could do was to keep out of sight as much as possible. So he learned to swim with only his head out of water, and sometimes with only the end of his nose out of water. When he went on land, he would cover himself with mud, and then when he heard anybody coming, he would lie perfectly still, with his legs and his tail and his head drawn in just as close as possible, so that he looked for all the world like just a little lump of brown earth.

"One day he had crawled under a piece of bark to rest and at the same time keep out of sight of any who might happen along. When he got ready to go on his way, he found that the piece of bark had caught on his back, and that he was carrying it with him. At first he was annoyed and started to shake it off. Before he succeeded, he heard someone coming, so he promptly drew in his head and legs and tail. It was Mr. Fisher, and he was very hungry and fierce. He looked at the piece of bark under which Mr. Turtle was hiding, but all he saw was the bark, because, you know, Mr. Turtle had drawn himself wholly under.

"I believe,' said Mr. Fisher, talking out loud to himself, 'that I'll have a look around the Smiling Pool and see if I can catch that slow-moving Turtle who lives there. I believe he'll make me a good dinner.'

"Of course Mr. Turtle heard just what he said, and he blessed the piece of bark which had hidden him from Mr. Fisher's sight. For a long time he lay very still. When he did go on, he took the greatest care not to shake off that piece of bark, for he didn't know but that any minute he might want to hide under it again. At last he reached the Smiling Pool and slipped into the water, leaving the piece of bark on the bank. Thereafter, when he wanted to go on land, he would first make sure that no one was watching. Then he would crawl under the piece of bark and get it on his back. Wherever he went he carried the piece of bark so as to have it handy to hide under.

"Now all this time Old Mother Nature had been watching Mr. Turtle, and it pleased her to see that he was smart enough to think of such a clever way of fooling his enemies. So she began to study how she could help Mr. Turtle. One day she came up behind him just as he sat down to rest. The piece of bark was uncomfortable and scratched his back, 'I wish,' said he, talking to himself, for he didn't know that any one else was near, 'I wish that I had a house of my own that I could carry on my back all the time and be perfectly safe when I was inside of it.'

"You shall have,' said Old Mother Nature, and reaching out, she touched his back and turned the skin into hard shell. Then she touched the skin of his stomach and turned that into hard shell. 'Now draw in your head and your legs and your tail,' said she.

Mr. Turtle did as he was told to do, and there he was in the very best and safest kind of a house, perfectly hidden from all his enemies!

"Oh, Mother Nature, how can I ever thank you?" he cried.

"By doing as you always have done, attending wholly to your own affairs,' replied Old Mother Nature.

"So ever since that long-ago day when the world was young, all Turtles have carried their houses with them and never have meddled in things that don't concern them," concluded Grandfather Frog.

"Oh, thank you, Grandfather Frog," exclaimed Peter, drawing a long breath. "That was a perfectly splendid thing for Old Mother Nature to do."

Then he started for his own home in the dear Old Briar-patch, and all the way there he wondered and wondered how Grandfather Frog knew that he wanted that story, and to this day he hasn't found out. You see, he didn't notice that Grandfather Frog was listening when he asked Spotty about his house. Of course, Grandfather Frog knows Peter and his curiosity so well that he had guessed right away that Peter would come to him for the story, just as Peter did.

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