

How Reddy Fox Was Surprised

by Thornton W. Burgess

Johnny Chuck and Reddy Fox lived very near together on the edge of the Green Meadows. Johnny Chuck was fat and roly-poly. Reddy Fox was slim and wore a bright red coat. Reddy Fox used to like to frighten Johnny Chuck by suddenly popping out from behind a tree and making believe that he was going to eat Johnny Chuck all up.

One bright summer day Johnny Chuck was out looking for a good breakfast of nice tender clover. He had wandered quite a long way from his snug little house in the long meadow grass, although his mother had told him never to go out of sight of the door. But Johnny was like some little boys I know, and forgot all he had been told.

He walked and walked and walked. Every few minutes Johnny Chuck saw something farther on that looked like a patch of nice fresh clover. And every time when he reached it Johnny Chuck found that he had made a mistake. So Johnny Chuck walked and walked and walked.

Old Mother West Wind, coming across the Green Meadows, saw Johnny Chuck and asked him where he was going. Johnny Chuck pretended not to hear and just walked faster.

One of the Merry Little Breezes danced along in front of him.

“Look out, Johnny Chuck, you will get lost,” cried the Merry Little Breeze then pulled Johnny's whiskers and ran away.

Higher and higher up in the sky climbed round, red Mr. Sun. Every time Johnny Chuck looked up at him Mr. Sun winked.

“So long as I can see great round, red Mr. Sun and he winks at me I can't be lost,” thought Johnny Chuck, and trotted on looking for clover.

By and by Johnny Chuck really did find some clover—just the sweetest clover that grew in the Green Meadows. Johnny Chuck ate and ate and ate and then what do you think he did? Why, he curled right up in the nice sweet clover and went fast asleep.

Great round, red Mr. Sun kept climbing higher and higher up in the sky, then by and by he began to go down on the other side, and long shadows began to creep out across the Green Meadows. Johnny Chuck didn't know anything about them: he was fast asleep.

By and by one of the Merry Little Breezes found Johnny Chuck all curled up in a funny round ball.

“Wake up Johnny Chuck! Wake up!” shouted the Merry Little Breeze.

Johnny Chuck opened his eyes. Then he sat up and rubbed them. For just a few, few minutes he couldn't remember where he was at all.

By and by he sat up very straight to look over the grass and see where he was. But he was so far from

home that he didn't see a single thing that looked at all like the things he was used to. The trees were all different. The bushes were all different. Everything was different. Johnny Chuck was lost.

Now, when Johnny sat up, Reddy Fox happened to be looking over the Green Meadows and he saw Johnny's head where it popped above the grass.

“Aha!” said Reddy Fox, “I'll scare Johnny Chuck so he'll wish he'd never put his nose out of his house.”

Then Reddy dropped down behind the long grass and crept softly, oh, ever so softly, through the paths of his own, until he was right behind Johnny Chuck. Johnny Chuck had been so intent looking for home that he didn't see anything else.

Reddy Fox stole right up behind Johnny and pulled Johnny's little short tail hard. How it did frighten Johnny Chuck! He jumped right straight up in the air and when he came down he was the maddest little woodchuck that ever lived in the Green Meadows.

Reddy Fox had thought that Johnny would run, and then Reddy meant to run after him and pull his tail and tease him all the way home. Now, Reddy Fox got as big a surprise as Johnny had had when Reddy pulled his tail. Johnny didn't stop to think that Reddy Fox was twice as big as he, but with his eyes snapping, and chattering as only a little Chuck can chatter, with every little hair on his little body standing right up on end, so that he seemed twice as big as he really was, he started for Reddy Fox.

It surprised Reddy Fox so that he didn't know what to do, and he simply ran. Johnny Chuck ran after him, nipping Reddy's heels every minute or two. Peter Rabbit just happened to be down that way. He was sitting up very straight looking to see what mischief he could get into when he caught sight of Reddy Fox running as hard as ever he could. “It must be that Bowser, the hound, is after Reddy Fox,” said Peter Rabbit to himself. “I must watch out that he doesn't find me.”

Just then he caught sight of Johnny Chuck with every little hair standing up on end and running after Reddy Fox as fast as his short legs could go.

“Ho! ho! ho!” shouted Peter Rabbit. “Reddy Fox afraid of Johnny Chuck! Ho! ho! Ho!”

Then Peter Rabbit scampered away to find Jimmy Skunk and Bobby Coon and Happy Jack Squirrel to tell them all about how Reddy Fox had run away from Johnny Chuck, for you see they were all a little afraid of Reddy Fox.

Straight home ran Reddy Fox as fast as he could go, and going home he passed the house of Johnny Chuck. Now Johnny couldn't run so fast as Reddy Fox and he was puffing and blowing as only a fat little woodchuck can puff and blow when he has to run hard. Moreover, he had lost his ill temper now and he thought it was the best joke ever to think that he had actually frightened Reddy Fox. When he came to his own house he stopped and sat on his hind legs once more. Then he shrilled out after Reddy Fox: “Reddy Fox is a 'fraid cat, 'fraid-cat! Reddy Fox is a 'fraid-cat!”

And all the Merry Little Breezes of Old Mother West Wind, who were playing on the Green Meadows shouted: “Reddy Fox is a 'fraid-cat, 'fraid-cat!”

And this is the way that Reddy Fox was surprised and that Johnny Chuck found his way home.

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