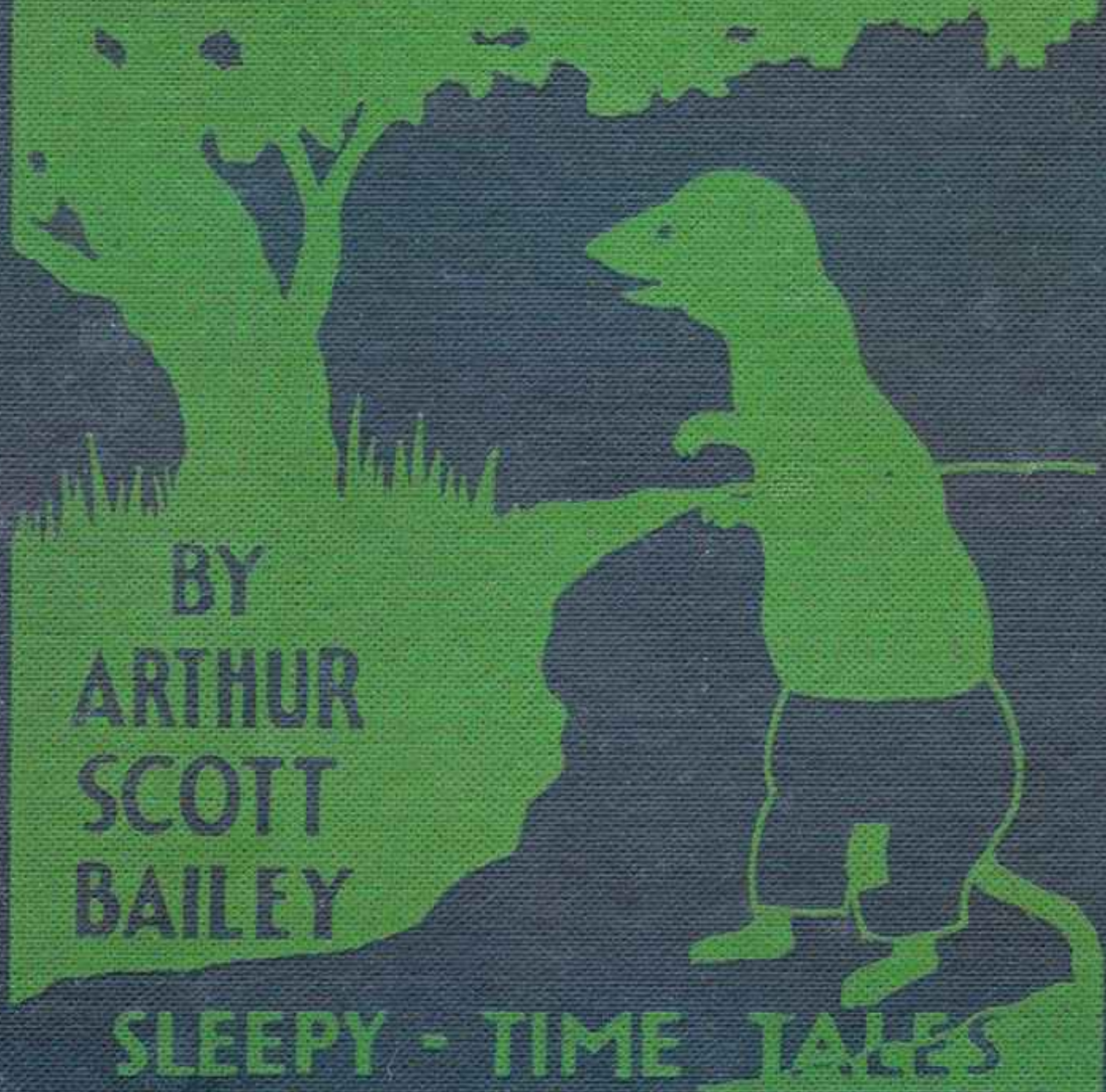


THE TALE OF PETER MINK

BY
ARTHUR
SCOTT
BAILEY

SLEEPY - TIME TALES



The Tale of Peter Mink

By Arthur Scott Bailey (1877-1949)

Arthur Scott Bailey (1877 – 1949) was author of more than forty children’s books. Bailey’s writing has been described thusly by the Newark Evening News: “Mr. Bailey centered all his plots in the animal, bird and insect worlds, weaving natural history into the stories in a way that won educator’s approval without arousing the suspicions of his young readers. He made it a habit to never ‘write down’ to children and frequently used words beyond the average juvenile vocabulary, believing that youngsters respond to the stimulus of the unfamiliar.” (Summary by Lucy)

Read by Lucy Burgoyne. Total Running Time: 01:53:22.

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THE TALE OF PETER MINK



BY

ARTHUR SCOTT BAILEY

AUTHOR OF

THE CUFFY BEAR STORIES

SLEEPY-TIME TALES, ETC.

Illustrations by

Joseph B. Guzie

GROSSET & DUNLAP

PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

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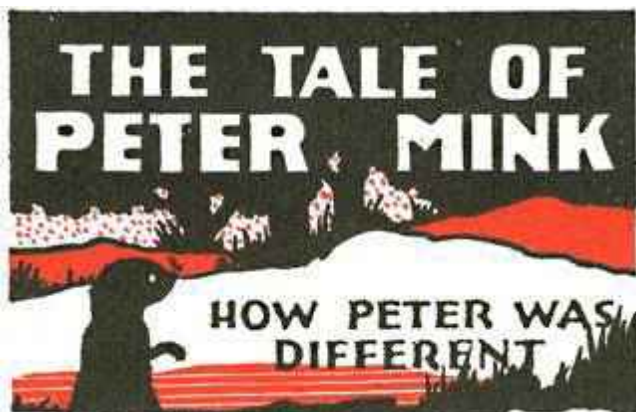
ILLUSTRATIONS

CHECK YOUR HAT AND COAT?

PETER SPLIT THE STICK PERFECTLY!

JIMMY WENT SAILING THROUGH THE AIR

PETER PULLED JIMMY OUT OF THE MUD



I How Peter Was Different

There were two ways in which Peter Mink was different from any other person in Pleasant Valley, or on Blue Mountain, either. In the first place, he had no home; and in the second, he had a very long neck.

The reason why Peter had no home was because he didn't want one. And the reason why he had such a long neck was because he couldn't help it.

When he grew sleepy he would crawl into any snug place he happened to find—sometimes in a hollow stump, or in a pile of rocks, or a haystack. And often he even drove a muskrat out of his house, so he could sleep there.

Most of the time Peter Mink went about in rags and tatters. Whenever he did have a new suit (which wasn't often) it never looked well for long. Naturally, sleeping in all sorts of places did not improve it. But what specially wore out his clothes was the way he was always squeezing through small holes and cracks. Wherever Peter saw a narrow place he never could resist trying to get through it.

He was a long, slim fellow, with a small, snake-like head. And he always knew that if he could squeeze his head through a crack he could get his body through it, too.

It is not at all strange that Mrs. Rabbit and Mrs. Squirrel and Mrs. Woodchuck—as well as a good many other people—did not care to have their sons in Peter Mink's company. They said that any one who went about looking as untidy as he did, and without a home, was not likely to set a good example to the young.

But Jimmy Rabbit and Frisky Squirrel and Billy Woodchuck loved to be with Peter Mink. To be sure, he was quarrelsome. And he was always ready to fight any one four times as big as he was. So they had to be careful not to offend him. But in spite of that, they found him interesting—he was such a fine swimmer. He could swim under water just as well as he could swim with his head above the surface. And in winter he was not afraid to swim under the ice in Broad Brook.

There was another thing about Peter Mink that made the *younger* forest people admire him. He was a famous fisherman. He could dive for a trout and catch him too, just as likely as not. And there was nothing more exciting than to see Peter Mink pull an eel out of the water.

It is really a great pity that he was so rough. But you see, he left home at an early age and grew up without having any one to tell him what he ought—and ought not—to do. No doubt he didn't know the difference between right and wrong. Jimmy Rabbit's mother used to call him "the Pest." She often remarked that she wished Peter would leave the neighborhood and never come back.

I am sure that Johnnie Green's father would have agreed with her, because Peter Mink was too fond of ducks to suit Farmer Green. Of course, Peter didn't care to eat ducks *all* the time. Sometimes he dined on a fat hen. But even then Farmer Green was angry. No doubt Peter Mink thought him hard to please.



II Sawing Wood

It was really no wonder that Mrs. Rabbit did not like Peter Mink. When you hear what happened the very first time she saw him you will understand why Mrs. Rabbit always called him "the Pest."

One day Mrs. Rabbit heard a knock on her door. And when she went to see who was there, she found a ragged young fellow, with his hat tipped far over on one side. Instead of a collar, he wore a handkerchief about his neck. But it would have taken at least a dozen handkerchiefs, tied one above another, to cover the stranger's neck; for it was by far the longest neck Mrs. Rabbit had ever seen.

"What do you want?" Mrs. Rabbit asked.

"Something to eat!" said the stranger.

You notice that he didn't say "Please!" That was a word that Peter Mink had never used. Probably he didn't even know what it meant.

Now, Mrs. Rabbit saw that the stranger was very thin. She did not know that no matter how much he ate, he would never be what you might call *fat*. That slimness was something that ran in Peter Mink's family. The Minks were always slender people.

Being a kind-hearted soul, Mrs. Rabbit went back to her kitchen. And soon she brought Peter a plateful of the best food she had.

"You're not ill, are you?" she asked Peter.

"No!" he answered, as he took the dish.

"Then," said Mrs. Rabbit, "I shall expect you to do some work, to pay for this food."

"All right!" said Peter. But he wished that he had said he was ill. For he simply hated work. And he made it a rule never to do a stroke of work if he could avoid it.

Well, he sat down on Mrs. Rabbit's doorstep and ate what she had given him. And while he was eating, Jimmy Rabbit came out and watched him. Even Jimmy Rabbit could see that he had very bad manners.

He held something to eat in each hand. And he didn't seem to care from which hand he ate, so long as he kept his mouth stuffed so full that he could hardly talk.

"What's your name?" Peter Mink asked Jimmy. And when Jimmy told him, he said: "No wonder you're fat, with such good things to eat as your mother makes."

When Mrs. Rabbit heard that she was pleased. And for a time she thought that perhaps the stranger was not so bad as he looked.

When he had almost finished his lunch, Mrs. Rabbit went back into her house once more. And pretty soon she came out with a saw in her hand. She gave the saw to Peter Mink and said:

"Now you may saw some wood, to pay me for the food. You'll find the wood-pile behind the house. And you may saw all of it," she added.

Peter Mink took the saw and started for the wood-pile. And Jimmy Rabbit followed him. Peter sawed just one stick of wood; and then he said to Jimmy:

"Go in and ask your mother if she can't find an old pair of shoes for me."

So Jimmy ran into the house to find his mother. And kind-hearted Mrs. Rabbit began at once to hunt for a pair of shoes to give the stranger. She had noticed that his toes were sticking out.

Pretty soon she found some shoes which she thought would fit the stranger. And when she stepped to her door again, there he was, waiting for her.

"What! Is the wood all sawed so soon?" asked Mrs. Rabbit. "If it is, you're a spry worker, young man!"

"The saw—" said Peter Mink—"the saw is no good at all. It broke before I finished sawing half the wood-pile." And that was true, too, in a way; because he had only sawed one stick.

"Well, if you've finished half of it you haven't done badly," Mrs. Rabbit told him. And she gave Peter Mink the shoes.

"They're not very new," he grumbled. "But they're better than none."

They certainly were much better than the shoes he had been wearing.

Then Peter Mink went slouching off. He did not even thank Mrs. Rabbit for her kindness. He did not even take away his old shoes, but left them on the doorstep for Mrs. Rabbit to pick up.

"I must say that young man has had no bringing up at all," she told Jimmy. "I hope this is the last we'll see of him.... Come!" she said. "Help me bring in some of the wood he sawed."

Well, Mrs. Rabbit was surprised when she found that the stranger had sawed only one stick.

When Mr. Rabbit came home he took just one look at his broken saw. And *he* was more than surprised. *He* was angry.

"Why," he said, "I do believe that good-for-nothing rascal broke my saw on purpose, so he wouldn't have to work."



III Making Peter Work

Peter Mink waited several days before he knocked at Mrs. Rabbit's door again. And when he did at last come back, he first made sure that her husband was not at home. You see, Peter had heard that Mr. Rabbit had told some of the forest-people that Peter had broken his saw, so he wouldn't have to saw wood to pay for the food that Mrs. Rabbit gave him.

When Mrs. Rabbit saw who it was that knocked, she came very near shutting the door in Peter's face. But she couldn't help noticing again how thin Peter was. And when he asked again for something to eat she hadn't the heart to refuse him.

"You're not ill, are you?" she asked.

"Well—yes, I am!" said Peter Mink, boldly. He would actually rather tell a lie than work. And he thought that if he said he was ill, Mrs. Rabbit wouldn't expect him to do any work to pay for what she might give him.

"You look to me as if you needed some cambric tea," Mrs. Rabbit said.

Now, if there was anything that Peter Mink disliked, it was cambric tea. If she had said "chicken broth," he might have liked that.

"I've been very ill," he said. "But now the doctor tells me I must have good, nourishing food—and plenty of it."

"Well, if you're well enough to eat, you're well enough to work," said Mrs. Rabbit.

"Oh, certainly!" answered Peter.

Mrs. Rabbit went into the house then. And when she came out again Peter Mink was surprised at what she brought. He had expected another plateful of goodies. But instead of that, Mrs. Rabbit had an axe in her hand.

"Here!" she said. "Take this out to the wood-pile—and use it! I want you to split every stick of wood you can find. Then knock on the door again and I'll bring you something to eat."

You ought to have seen Peter Mink scowl, as he walked away to the wood-pile with the axe on his shoulder. It was a lesson to anybody, never to frown!

"She needn't think she can make *me* work!" Peter said to himself. "I'll just break her old axe—that's what I'll do!" And he swung the axe with all his might at a stick of wood.

But the axe didn't break. And as for the stick, it fell in two pieces; for Peter had split it perfectly.

He was so out of patience that he aimed a hard blow at another stick of wood. Again, he didn't hurt the axe at all. And again he split the wood exactly as Mrs. Rabbit wanted him to. But Peter never thought of that.

Peter Mink scowled even worse than ever. And he made up his mind that he would break Mrs. Rabbit's axe if he had to use up the whole wood-pile to do it.

Well, that is just what happened. Peter tried so hard to break the axe so he wouldn't have to work, that before he knew it he had split all the wood.

He was just about to look for a rock, then—on which to break the axe—when he happened to think that there was no longer any sense in trying to do that, because the work was all done!



So he put the axe across his shoulder and went and knocked on Mrs. Rabbit's door.

"Bring on your food!" he said, when Mrs. Rabbit appeared.

"Is the axe all right?" she asked. "It didn't break, did it?"

"No, indeed!" he said—"though I was rather expecting it would."

"Is the wood all split?" she inquired.

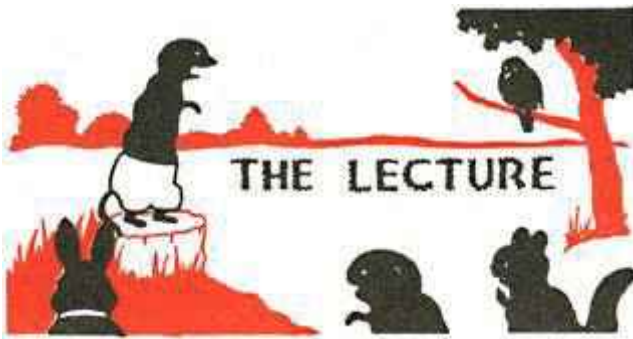
"Every stick of it!" answered Peter.

"Then bring it here, near the back door," Mrs. Rabbit told him. "That will help pay for the saw you broke here last week."

"I'll do nothing of the kind!" said Peter Mink. And he was so angry that he went back to the wood-pile and began throwing sticks of wood at Mrs. Rabbit's house, trying to break a window. And before he knew it he had thrown the whole wood-pile in almost the exact spot where Mrs. Rabbit wanted it. And he hadn't broken a single window, either.

But Peter Mink never once realized what he had done. He went off to take a swim in the brook, and maybe catch a trout.

Later when Mrs. Rabbit saw that in spite of what Peter had said, he had moved her wood-pile for her, she wondered why he had not asked for something to eat. But Peter Mink never knocked on her door again. He kept away from Mrs. Rabbit ever afterward, because she was the only person who had ever been able to make him work.



IV The Lecture

Peter Mink was going to give a lecture. He had invited everybody.

"It's something you all ought to hear," he said. "And it will cost you nothing to come. Another time," he explained, "whoever hears my lecture will have to pay. But this one is free."

Old Mr. Crow remarked that he supposed Peter Mink was going to tell people how to catch ducks. And since he never cared anything at all about ducks, he said he didn't expect to be present.

"I'm glad you're not coming," Peter Mink answered, "because I'm afraid there won't be room for all the people who intend to hear me. As for ducks—I'd no more think of giving a lecture about ducks than I would about *crows*."

Old Mr. Crow pretended not to hear what Peter said. He did not care even to be seen talking with such a worthless fellow.

But there were many other people living in Pleasant Valley and on Blue Mountain who decided to go to Peter Mink's lecture—when they learned that they might get in free.

And when the night of the lecture arrived even Peter himself was surprised to see how many were present.

To be sure, Peter noticed that some of the audience were smiling; and some of them were nudging one another, as if they thought the whole thing was nothing but a joke. And when the full moon climbed over the top of Blue Mountain, and Peter Mink climbed on top of an old stump and faced the gathering, a few rude persons laughed aloud.

"What about ducks?" somebody called from a tree above Peter's head. Everybody tittered at that, because everybody knew that Peter was very fond of ducks and spent much of his time at Farmer Green's duck pond.

It was old Mr. Crow who asked that question. He had come to the lecture, in spite of what he had said.

"My lecture," Peter Mink began, when all was quiet, "my lecture to-night is going to be about a poor boy who has no one to take care of him. He has no home. And very often he goes about in rags. Sometimes he begs for food and clothes. I think," Peter said, "we all ought to be very sorry for him."

As soon as Peter said that, Mrs. Squirrel and Mrs. Woodchuck took out their pocket-handkerchiefs and wiped their eyes. And Mrs. Squirrel's husband was heard to remark that it was a shame, and that he thought something ought to be done.

Well, Peter Mink went on and told them as many as twenty-three different tales about that poor boy, to show them what a hard life he led. Every tale was sadder than the one just before it. And by the time Peter had finished the twenty-third, there were very few dry eyes in the place. And Mr. Squirrel spoke up loudly and said once more that *something* ought to be done about it.

When he said that, Uncle Jerry Chuck rose hurriedly and hobbled away from the lecture. He had sat in one of the best seats, because it was free. And he had wept quite noisily, once or twice, because it cost no more to weep and he wanted all he could get for nothing. But when Mr. Squirrel said what he did, Uncle Jerry at once thought of a *collection*. And he decided that he had better leave before it was too late.

Peter Mink saw him go. And here and there he noticed other people who looked as if they would like to leave, too. And he knew that there was no time to lose.

"I see one gentleman leaving," Peter Mink said in a loud voice. "I hope no more will go—unless, of course, they're so stingy that they wouldn't care to give a little something to help this poor boy I've been telling you about."

After that, nobody wanted to leave, because nobody wanted to be thought stingy.

"I appoint Mr. Rabbit and Mr. Woodchuck to take up a *collection* for this poor boy," Peter Mink said. "And I've no doubt that they will be glad to give all they can, themselves."

Mr. Rabbit and Mr. Woodchuck saw that everybody was looking at them. And they at once emptied their pocket-books into their hats.

"What's his name? What's the poor boy's name?" a hoarse voice called. It was Mr. Crow who asked the question.

"That," said Peter Mink, "is something I do not care to tell to everybody."

And many people clapped their hands. They were beginning to have a better opinion of Peter Mink.

But old Mr. Crow only laughed loudly from his perch in the tree.



V Passing the Hat

After giving all they happened to have in their pocket-books, Mr. Rabbit and Mr. Woodchuck began to pass their hats to take up the collection for the poor boy that Peter Mink had been telling them about. And all the people who had come to hear Peter's lecture began to dig down into their pockets.

"That's right!" Peter cried. "Give what you can! Of course, I don't expect the poor people to give as much as the rich."

That made everybody decide that he would give all he had with him. And many people wished they had brought more. Besides, no one wanted to be thought stingy, like Uncle Jerry Chuck, who had hurried away as soon as he suspected that there was going to be a collection.

When Mr. Rabbit and Mr. Woodchuck had passed their hats to every person present, their hats were filled to the brim. And they marched proudly up to the stump where Peter Mink still stood.

Peter jumped down to the ground.

"Keep your seats, everybody!" he called. "The next thing to be done is to count this money. And I will do that myself." So Peter picked up the two hats and started away.

"Where are you going?" Mr. Rabbit asked him.

"Just a little way into the woods," said Peter. "It's so noisy here, with all this talking, that I might make a mistake."

"We'll go with you and help you," Mr. Rabbit told him.

"Oh, you don't need to do that," said Peter Mink.

But Mr. Rabbit insisted.

"One of those hats is mine," he remarked. "And wherever *it* goes, I go, too," And he beckoned to Mr. Woodchuck to follow.

Well, Peter Mink didn't like that very well. You see, he had planned to go into the woods alone with the money. And nobody likes to have his plans upset. But there was nothing he could say. So they all three went into a thicket of elderberry bushes and counted the money.

"I thought there was more," Peter said. "Maybe we dropped some of the money. You and Mr. Woodchuck had better go back and see if you can find any," he told Mr. Rabbit.

But Mr. Rabbit said that they could just as well all go back together and search along the ground as they went.

"All right!" said Peter Mink. "Well leave these hatfuls right here for a while."

But Mr. Rabbit said he didn't think that would be a safe thing to do. So he picked up one hatful, and told Mr. Woodchuck to carry the other.

Peter Mink didn't like that at all. But there was nothing he could say. So they all went back together to the place where the rest of the people were still waiting. And they found no more money, either.

Mr. Rabbit jumped up on the stump where Peter had stood and talked.

"The question is," he said, "who is going to take charge of all this money?"

"I am!" said Peter Mink.

But Mr. Rabbit said he didn't think that would be safe.

"You have no home, you know," he told Peter. "And you can't very well carry the money about with you. I must have my hat back; and no doubt Mr. Woodchuck will want his, too."

Mr. Woodchuck nodded his head. He certainly did want his hat. It was the best one he had.

"I would suggest—" said Mr. Rabbit then—"I would suggest that I take one hatful home with me, and that Mr. Woodchuck take the other to his house. Then we'll each have our hats; and the money will be perfectly safe."

"That's a good idea!" Peter Mink said. "The only trouble with it is that it won't do at all. For you and Mr. Woodchuck don't know the poor boy. So how could you ever give him the money?"

Everybody said that was so.

"This Peter Mink is certainly a bright young fellow," people told one another.

Mr. Rabbit looked puzzled.

"What do *you* suggest, then?" he asked Peter.

Peter Mink smiled. He seemed pleased, for one reason or another.

"This stump," he said, "is hollow. As you can all see, there's a small hole in it. We can put the money in there and nobody can get it out. It will be the same as in a bank."

Mr. Rabbit looked at the hole in the stump.

"I know *I* can't get through that hole," he said. "But what about you, young fellow?" he asked Peter.

"Oh, I can't squeeze through such a small hole as this," said Peter. "See!" He pushed his nose part way through the hole. And there his head seemed to stick. He could have squirmed through if he had really tried. But nobody else seemed to know it.

"But how is the poor boy ever going to get his money?" Mr. Rabbit inquired.

"Oh, he's very slim," Peter Mink said. "*He* can get inside the stump. Don't you worry about *him!*"

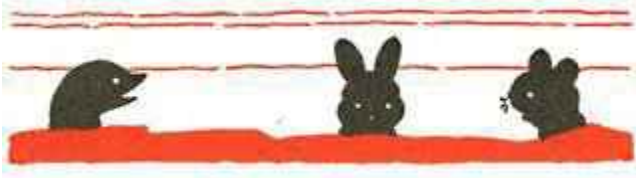
Everybody seemed satisfied. So they dropped the money through the hole.

And then Mr. Rabbit said:

"When are you going to bring the poor boy to get the money?"

"To-morrow night would be a good time," Peter Mink said. "Would you all like to come here to-morrow night at this same hour?"

And everybody said, "Yes!"



VI Mr. Rabbit Is Worried

When Mr. Rabbit reached home, after Peter Mink's lecture, and told his wife about the money that had been collected for the poor boy whom Peter Mink knew, she asked:

"Who has the money?"

"Oh, it's safe," said Mr. Rabbit. "It's hidden in an old stump. And the hole in the stump is so small that even Peter himself can't crawl through it."

"How do you know he can't?"

"He tried," said Mr. Rabbit.

"How do you know he tried as hard as he could?" Mrs. Rabbit asked.

That was what made Mr. Rabbit worry. So instead of going to bed, he hurried back to the place where Peter had given his famous lecture; and there he hid himself under a small pine.

Mr. Rabbit hadn't waited long before he saw some one come out of the elderberry bushes and hurry up to the stump.

It was Peter Mink! He had a bag in his hand. And while Mr. Rabbit was watching, he squeezed through the hole in the stump. Even for Peter Mink the hole was almost too small. But he managed to squirm through, though it cost him a few groans; and he said some words that made Mr. Rabbit shake his head.

Well, as soon as Peter was inside the hole he began to push the money through it. And then what do you suppose Mr. Rabbit did? He crept up to the stump, picked up the bag, which Peter had left on the ground, and as fast as the money rolled out of the hole, Mr. Rabbit put it inside the bag.

The bag was almost full when the money stopped rolling out of the hole. And Mr. Rabbit heard Peter Mink say to himself:

"That seems to be all!"

And as soon as he heard that, Mr. Rabbit hurried away, with the bag of money over his shoulder.

Peter Mink waited a bit, to see if he could find more money. But he had thrown it all out. So he squeezed through the hole again. Then he turned to pick up the bag. But it had vanished.

"That's queer!" said Peter Mink. "I thought I left that bag right here." He looked all around, but he couldn't find it anywhere. So he took off his ragged coat and laid it on the ground. "I'll put the money in this!" Peter said.

But when he looked for the money he couldn't find a single piece.

"That's queer!" said Peter. "It must have rolled away from the stump." And he began to search all about. But the money, too, had vanished completely. And Peter Mink couldn't understand it.

The following night, when everybody came back again, expecting that Peter Mink would bring the poor boy with him to get the money, Peter never appeared at all.

Finally Mr. Rabbit jumped on top of the stump and told his friends what had happened the night before.

"And now," he said, "everybody can come right up here and get his money back, for there's no doubt at all that Peter Mink was collecting it for himself. *He* was the poor boy he told us about."

Everybody was surprised. But everybody was glad to get his money again. In fact, there was only one person who grumbled; and that was Uncle Jerry Chuck. He hurried up to the stump ahead of all the rest, to get some money. And he seemed more surprised than ever when Mr. Rabbit said there was no money there for *him*.

"I was at the lecture last night," Uncle Jerry said.

"But you left before the money was collected," Mr. Rabbit replied.

Uncle Jerry admitted that that was so. But he claimed that he had made *less trouble* for everybody, because no one had been obliged to handle the money that he hadn't given.

But Mr. Rabbit told him he ought to be ashamed of himself. And every one will say that Peter Mink ought to have been ashamed of him, too.



VII Peter's Bad Temper

Peter Mink was always quarreling. And he seemed always ready to fight—to fight even people who were four times bigger than he was. And when he fought, Peter usually won. But there was one person Peter Mink was afraid of; and that was Fatty Coon. Fatty was almost too big for Peter Mink to whip. And his teeth were very sharp. And his claws were like thorns.

One day Peter and Fatty had a dispute. Fatty Coon had said that a hen made the finest meal in the world. But Peter Mink spoke up at once and said it wasn't so.

"There's nothing quite like a duck," he said.

Fatty Coon sneered.

"Ducks may be all right," he cried. "In fact, in my opinion they are far too good for any member of the Mink family to eat. But for me—give me a plump hen!" And just thinking about hens made him hungry. And being hungry made him think of green corn. "Give me a plump hen and plenty of green corn!" And he looked all around, as if he expected somebody would hurry up to him with a hen in one hand and a dozen ears of corn in the other.

But nobody came.

"You're a big glutton!" Peter Mink shouted. He was very angry. But he did not dare fight Fatty Coon.

"I guess you wish I was smaller," said Fatty Coon, "so you could fight me."

At that, Peter Mink looked very fierce. And he turned to Frisky Squirrel and Billy Woodchuck and Jimmy Rabbit and shouted:

"Take hold of me, quick, you fellows—before I hurt him! For I can't keep my hands off him a second longer!"

When they heard that, Fatty's friends were frightened. They were afraid Peter Mink would fly at him and hurt him terribly. So they all seized Peter and held him fast, while they begged Fatty to run away.

Now, Fatty Coon was not the least bit afraid of Peter. But talking of good things to eat had made him so hungry that he felt he must hurry down to Farmer Green's cornfield at once. So he said "Good-bye!" and left them.

After Fatty had disappeared, Peter Mink said it was safe to let him go again, but that it was lucky they had held him.

And Frisky Squirrel and Billy Woodchuck and Jimmy Rabbit agreed afterwards that Peter Mink was a dangerous fellow. They were glad that Fatty Coon had escaped.

The next day, almost the same thing happened again. Only this time Peter Mink remarked that there was nothing any tastier than a fine eel. Fatty Coon told him that eels might be good enough for the Mink family, but as for him, he preferred green peas.

"Somebody hold me, quick!" Peter Mink screamed. "I don't want to hurt him—but I'm losing my temper fast."

Several of Fatty Coon's friends started to seize Peter Mink, so Fatty might run away. But there was one person present who had not been there the day before. This was Tommy Fox. And he only laughed when Peter Mink said what he did.

"Don't touch him!" Tommy Fox told the others. "Let's see what he'll do. Fatty isn't afraid of him."

"Why, certainly not!" Fatty Coon said. And he smiled in such a way that he showed his sharp teeth.

"Somebody stop me, before it's too late!" Peter Mink cried.

But nobody laid a hand on him. And still Peter did not move.

"Go ahead!" Tommy Fox urged him. "You said you were losing your temper, you know."

"I'm waiting!" Fatty Coon called. And he held up both his front paws. Peter saw how strong and sharp his claws were.

"I declare," Peter Mink said, "I haven't lost my temper, after all. I felt it going—for a moment. But it came back again."



VIII At the Garden-Party

Peter Mink was angry with Tommy Fox; for it was he who showed everybody that Peter was afraid of Fatty Coon. Peter Mink was so angry that he went about telling everyone he met how he was going to punish Tommy Fox. "When I finish with him," he said, "he'll know enough to keep his advice to himself."

"What are you going to do to him?" Jimmy Rabbit inquired.

"Well, I'm going to bite his nose," Peter explained, "because it was his nose that he stuck in my affairs." And Peter went away muttering even worse things to his cousin, who was with him. His cousin's name was Slim Mink. And he was spending the summer in Farmer Green's haystack near the duck pond.

Slim had heard somewhere that there was a place called the Reform School, where boys were sent who fought too much. And he began to be afraid that if Peter did to Tommy Fox half the things he said he was going to do, some one would come along and catch Peter and send him to the Reform School.

And the Reform School was an awful place! Why, boys who went there had to sleep in beds! They had to wash their faces every morning, and brush their hair, and have table manners! It was no wonder that Slim began to worry.

"You'd better let that young fox alone!" he told Peter. "You fight too much. If you don't look out, something dreadful will happen to you, some day. You'll get sent to the Reform School."

But Peter Mink told him to hold his tongue. "If you're not careful," Peter said, "I'll bite your nose, too."

Now, Slim was smaller than his cousin Peter. And he didn't want his nose bitten. So he kept quiet after that. But he hoped that Peter would take his advice.

"Let's go down to the brook and fish," he suggested, hoping that he could get Peter's mind off Tommy Fox.

"You can go if you want to," said Peter Mink. "And save me some fish, too, or it will be the worse for you!"

Slim decided that he wouldn't go fishing, after all. And he roamed through the woods with Peter, who was determined to find Tommy Fox.

And at last Peter found him, at a garden-party that was being given by Jimmy Rabbit, in Farmer Green's garden.

Everybody but Tommy Fox was having refreshments. But he said he didn't feel like eating anything. That was because he was polite. He never cared for lettuce, or peas, or cabbage.

Peter Mink had not been invited to the garden-party. But that made no difference to him. Before anyone knew what was happening he marched straight up to Tommy Fox and bit him on the nose.

Then there followed such an uproar as had never before been seen in Farmer Green's garden. Tommy Fox and Peter Mink rolled over and over upon the ground. And for a long time nobody could tell one from the other.

But after a while that squirming heap of tails and legs began to turn more slowly, until at last it stopped altogether.

Peter Mink was a sad sight. He had been ragged enough, before the fight. But now he looked ten times worse. And one of his eyes was closed. And he had lost his hat, and one shoe.

Everyone was glad that the trouble was over. And everyone was glad that Tommy Fox had won.

And to everybody's surprise, the gladdest of all was Slim Mink, Peter's cousin.

"Hurrah!" he cried. (The others had been too polite to say anything.)

"What makes you shout that?" Peter asked Slim as he crawled away.

"Why," his cousin answered, "Tommy Fox hurt you, instead of your hurting him. And now you won't have to go to the Reform School."

But for once Peter Mink thought there might be worse places than that. He thought that maybe a real bed would feel pretty comfortable, just then.



IX Helping Jimmy Rabbit

Peter Mink was feeling even more peevish than usual. And this was the reason: Jimmy Rabbit had a new sled.

Now, Peter had never owned a sled; and it made him envious to see what a good time Jimmy was having, coasting down the side of Blue Mountain.

There was only one thing that Jimmy Rabbit did not like about his sled. It went so fast that he always fell off long before he reached the end of the slide.

"I can fix that," Peter Mink told him. "You go home and borrow your father's hammer and a few nails, and I'll show you how you can coast 'way down into Pleasant Valley without once tumbling off."

Jimmy thanked him. And he hurried home at once. He dragged his new sled after him, too; for he was afraid that if he left it behind he might not be able to find Peter Mink—or the sled, either—when he came back again.

But Peter did not seem to care. Perhaps he had something on his mind. Anyhow, when Jimmy Rabbit returned with the hammer and nails, Peter Mink was waiting patiently for him.

"Now, then," said Peter, as he took the nails and the hammer, "you sit on the sled, Jimmy, and I'll fix you up in no time."

So Jimmy Rabbit sat down on his new sled. And in a few minutes Peter Mink had nailed Jimmy's trousers fast to the sled.

"Now you simply *can't* fall off," Peter said. "I'll give you a push; and the first thing you know, you'll be down in the valley."

Jimmy Rabbit said to himself that Peter Mink was very bright, to think of such a splendid plan as nailing his trousers to the sled. He thanked Peter; and he gripped the sled tightly—though he didn't need to—while Peter gave him a push that sent him flying down the mountainside.

Though he went like the wind, he never fell off once. And soon he was down in Pleasant Valley, skimming over the crust which covered the drifts in Farmer Green's meadow.

At last the sled stopped. And then Jimmy Rabbit decided that Peter Mink had forgotten something. How was he to get off the sled with his trousers nailed fast to it? And what would his mother say, when she saw the nail-holes in his trousers? And what would his father do, when *he* saw the nails in Jimmy's new sled?

It was not very pleasant for Jimmy Rabbit, sitting all alone in the meadow, with such thoughts running through his head.

After he had sat there a while Jimmy heard something that worried him even more. He heard old dog Spot barking. And he saw that he would be in a good deal of a fix if Spot should happen to come along and find him. For he couldn't stir from his sled.

Jimmy began to hate that sled. He wished he had never seen it... And then he heard somebody scampering over the crust. He was almost too frightened to look around to see who it was. But he turned his head. And he was glad to find that it was Peter Mink, who had run all the way down from Blue Mountain.

"You had a fine ride, didn't you?" said Peter Mink.

"Yes," Jimmy answered. "But I liked the beginning of it better than the end."

"Why, what's the matter?" Peter inquired.

"I can't get off the sled," Jimmy said.

Peter Mink pretended to be surprised. And he said that he hadn't thought of that.

"But I'll help you," he promised.

Jimmy Rabbit thanked him.

"But," said Peter Mink, "I can't do all these things for you for nothing, of course. I have too much else to do, to be wasting my time like this, without pay."

"What do you want?" Jimmy Rabbit asked him.

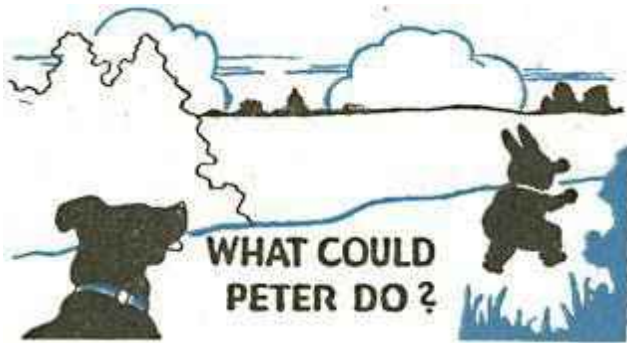
"Give me the sled," said Peter Mink, "and I'll help you to get off it."

"All right," Jimmy agreed. He would even have given Peter his wheelbarrow; too, he was so anxious to be freed from his seat. "I think, though, that you might pull me up the mountain," Jimmy added. "I don't

feel like walking." And that was quite true, because he had been so frightened, when he heard old Spot barking, that his legs were still shaking.

"Well," said Peter Mink, "I'm pretty particular who rides on my sled. But I'll pull you up the mountain, because I'm going that way myself, to slide."

And he started off, dragging Jimmy Rabbit behind him.



X What Could Peter Do?

Peter Mink was pulling Jimmy Rabbit up the mountainside. You remember that Jimmy had a new sled, and that Peter had nailed Jimmy's trousers to the sled, so he wouldn't fall off when he slid down Blue Mountain. But when Jimmy had coasted down into the meadow he found he could not get off the sled. So Peter Mink had offered to help him, if Jimmy would give him the sled in return for his kindness.

"How do you like my new sled?" Peter Mink asked Jimmy Rabbit, as he stopped to rest, after climbing a steep slope.

But before Jimmy Rabbit could answer, an alarming sound rang through the clear air and startled them both. It was old dog Spot, baying as if he had found some very interesting tracks.

"Hurry!" Jimmy Rabbit cried. "We don't want Spot to catch us!"

"Get off my sled!" Peter Mink ordered. "How can I run fast, pulling a great, fat fellow like you?"

"How can I get off," Jimmy answered, "when I'm nailed fast to the sled?"

"I'll get you off," said Peter. And he took hold of Jimmy Rabbit's ears and began to pull as hard as he could. But the sled only slipped along on the snow.

"Grab this sapling!" Peter Mink cried, drawing Jimmy close to a small tree. "And I'll pull the sled from under you." But all his pulling did no more than to make Jimmy's arms ache. For Jimmy was nailed so fast to the sled that he stuck to it—or *it* stuck to *him*—as if they were just one, instead of two, things.

"I wish my mother hadn't made me wear such stout trousers," Jimmy Rabbit said. For once, he wished he wore old, ragged clothes, like Peter's. If he had, he thought he might have torn himself away from the sled. But now there seemed no hope for him, because old Spot's voice sounded nearer every minute.

At last Peter Mink became so angry because Jimmy didn't get off the sled that he flew at him and began to pommel him.

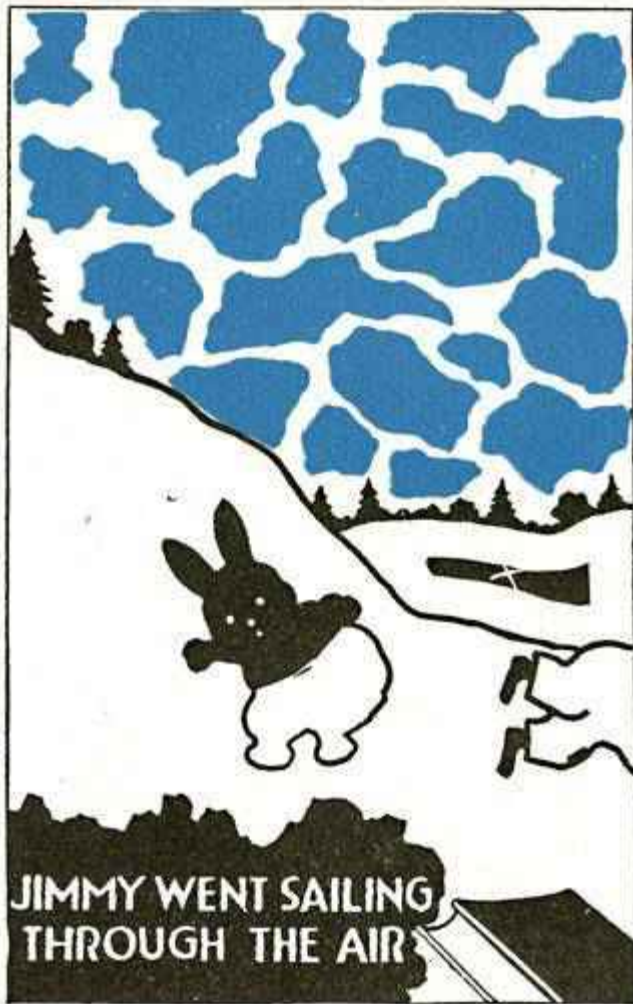
When Peter threw himself upon Jimmy the sled began to move. But Peter was so enraged he never noticed that, until they were coasting down the mountain so fast that he didn't dare jump off.

Once they struck something. They couldn't see what it was, because they were traveling like the wind. But Jimmy Rabbit thought he heard a frightened sort of yelp. Then they tore on again.

Before they reached the foot of Blue Mountain they struck something else. This time there was no yelp, for they ran right into a big maple tree. And Jimmy Rabbit felt himself sailing through the air, until at last he landed on top of a big drift, broke through the crust, and sank into the soft snow beneath.

He crawled quickly out of the drift. And when he saw that he and the sled had parted company he was so delighted that he never minded his torn trousers.

He looked around. And there was the sled, as good as ever, except for the nails Peter Mink had driven into it. And there was Peter Mink, lying very still beneath the maple tree. Though Jimmy listened, he could no longer hear old Spot baying.



That was because old Spot was running home as fast as his legs would carry him. He didn't know what it was that had struck him; and he was frightened.

When Jimmy Rabbit saw Peter Mink slowly open one eye he knew that it wouldn't be long before Peter was himself again. So Jimmy hurried back up the mountain, pulling the sled after him.

The next day, who should come to Jimmy's house but Peter Mink.

"I've come for my sled," he said.

"What sled?" asked Jimmy Rabbit.

"Why, the one you gave me for getting you off it," Peter answered.

"But *you* didn't get me off the sled," Jimmy told him. "You don't even know how I got off. So I certainly am not going to give you my sled."

And Peter Mink had to go away empty-handed. He didn't like it at all. But what could he do?



XI The Circus Parade

If it hadn't been for the circus posters on Farmer Green's barn, the idea of having a circus parade would never have occurred to Jimmy Rabbit.

You see, all those wonderful pictures set him thinking. And he lost no time in inviting everybody to help. He even invited Peter Mink, though he was sorry, afterwards, that he had.

For a day or two everybody in the neighborhood of Blue Mountain was as busy as he could be, getting ready for the parade. Cuffy Bear had promised to be the elephant, because he was so big. Frisky Squirrel was to be a wolf, on account of his being so gray. And Jimmy had invited Peter Mink to march as a giraffe, for the reason that he had such a long neck. And as for Jimmy Rabbit himself, he said that he expected to be a little pitcher, because he had heard that they had big ears.

"I've heard that, too," remarked Billy Woodchuck. "But I never knew that a pitcher was an animal."

"Well, you see you have a good deal to learn," Jimmy Rabbit said.

Then Tommy Fox murmured something about having heard that little pitchers had big mouths, too, and that they always talked a good deal. But Jimmy Rabbit made believe he didn't hear him.

Everything would have been pleasant, on the day of the parade, if it hadn't been for Peter Mink. He insisted that he must lead the procession; and that made trouble at once, because Jimmy Rabbit had expected to do that.

Peter finally settled the dispute.

"A parade," he said, "has two ends. Of course, one person can't march at both ends at the same time. So while I march at the front end, Jimmy Rabbit can march at the other. And that's perfectly fair."

At first Jimmy Rabbit looked quite glum. But pretty soon he seemed to feel more cheerful; and he said, "All right!"

Then there was a great bustle, and much talking, as the parade prepared to start.

"Remember!" Peter Mink warned everybody, "you must follow everywhere I go, because I'm the leader."

At that, Cuffy Bear seemed somewhat worried. He knew that Peter Mink was fond of squeezing through narrow places; and he didn't see how he could follow him.

But after a while Cuffy began to smile again—right after Jimmy Rabbit had come and whispered something in his ear. You see, Jimmy went to everybody in the parade and whispered. And last of all he went to Peter Mink and whispered in his ear, too.

"Everybody must look straight ahead," Jimmy told Peter, "because that's the way they always do in a circus parade."

"Don't you suppose I know that, just as well as you do?" snapped Peter Mink. "You'd better hurry back to the other end of the parade, because I'm going to start in exactly two or three minutes—I'm not sure which."

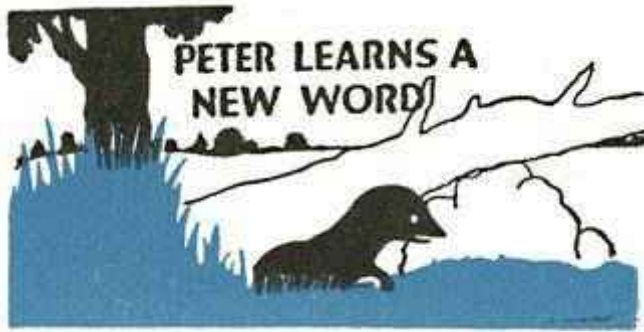
So Jimmy Rabbit hurried back as fast as he could. He might have run faster, if he hadn't stopped to wink at every person in the line. But he just managed to reach his place when the parade started.

Then a queer thing happened. When everybody had taken ten steps, the whole parade turned about in its tracks and started marching in the opposite direction. And now Jimmy Rabbit led the procession, instead of Peter Mink.

I said the *whole* parade turned around; but what I meant to say was *everybody but Peter Mink*. You see, Jimmy Rabbit had told Peter not to look back, but to march straight ahead, with his eyes to the front. And naturally, Peter Mink supposed that that was what Jimmy had whispered to everyone else.

So away Peter Mink marched, trying to look as much like a giraffe as he could, and feeling very proud, too—because he thought the parade was following him.





XII Peter Learns a New Word

While Peter Mink marched on, believing that the circus parade was following him (when Jimmy Rabbit had actually led it away in the opposite direction), Peter kept trying to think of some trick he could play on the parade.

He decided, at last, that he would hunt around until he found the smallest hole he could possibly squeeze through, and he would squirm through it, and then have fun watching the others try to follow him.

Finally he found a log which lay upon a rocky ledge. Between the log and the rock there was a narrow opening. And when he saw that, Peter knew it was the very place he had been looking for. Without once glancing around, he thrust his head through the crack.

Then something happened. Peter Mink always claimed, afterwards, that the log settled a bit lower, or the rock rose a bit higher. Anyhow, to his astonishment, he found himself stuck fast under the log. Such a thing had never happened to him before.

"Well!" he said to himself, "there are plenty of people here to help me, anyhow." You see, he hadn't discovered that the whole parade—except him—had turned about and followed Jimmy Rabbit.

Peter Mink thought it was strange that nobody came and offered to help him. And soon he began to shout.

Still no one came. And Peter began to wish that he hadn't tried to play a trick on the parades. For he saw that he was in something very like a trap. In fact, it *was* a trap, which Johnnie Green had set. But Peter didn't know that. If he had, he would have been even more worried than he was. It was bad enough, just to imagine what would happen if old dog Spot should come along and find him.

Jimmy Rabbit had a fine time leading the parade. You may be sure *he* looked around at the procession following him. And he shouted a good many orders, too, telling different ones just what they should or shouldn't do.

The parade had marched through the woods for a long time; and Jimmy was about to stop and tell everybody that the fun was over, when he saw all at once that it was really just going to begin. For right in front of him he saw his friend. Peter Mink, pinned fast beneath the log.

"You've been long enough coming to help me!" Peter Mink growled. "Get this log off me—you people—and be quick about it!"

Brownie Beaver left his place in the parade and hurried forward, because he knew more about handling logs than anybody else there. But before he could get his coat off, Jimmy Rabbit called him one side and whispered to him. And then Jimmy whispered to everybody else. And the parade disbanded. Then everybody crowded around Peter Mink.

"What is it you want?" Jimmy Rabbit asked Peter.

"Want?" Peter Mink screamed. "Are you blind? Can't you see this great log on top of me? Can't you get it off? What are you waiting for?"

"Ah!" said Jimmy Rabbit. "We are waiting for just one thing. And we haven't heard it yet."

"Heard it?" Peter Mink snarled. "Aren't your ears big enough to hear everything?"

"We're going to teach you something," said Jimmy. "And until you've learned the lesson, we're going to leave you right where you are."

You should have heard Peter Mink then—or rather, you're lucky you *didn't* hear him. For the way he went on was something dreadful. But until Jimmy Rabbit heard what he was waiting for, he wouldn't let anyone roll the log off Peter.

Finally it grew so late that some of the paraders said they would have to be going home pretty soon. And then Billy Woodchuck remarked that he didn't believe Peter Mink had the least idea what they were waiting for.

"I think we ought to tell him," Billy said.

So Jimmy Rabbit told Peter what it was.

"I don't know what it means," said Peter.

"Well—say it, anyhow!" Jimmy Rabbit ordered. "And after this, whenever you want anybody to do anything for you, don't forget to say it! It wouldn't do you a bit of harm to practice saying it every day, for a while, until you get used to it."

Peter Mink looked as if he would have liked to do something to Jimmy Rabbit. And for a long time he refused to obey. But when Brownie Beaver said that he simply *must* go home, because it was so late, Peter Mink said what Jimmy had been waiting for.

It was "Please!"

And no doubt you guessed it long ago.



XIII Good News About Peter

"Yes! They say he has at last decided to go to work," Mrs. Rabbit was saying to Billy Woodchuck's mother.

"It's the best news I've heard in a long while," Mrs. Woodchuck remarked. "And I hope he'll be so busy that he won't have time to come around here and get our sons into any more mischief."

"Have you learned what his work is going to be?" Mrs. Rabbit inquired.

But Mrs. Woodchuck said she didn't know that. She only knew that Peter Mink was going to turn over a new leaf and do some sort of honest work.

Now, Peter Mink had a plan. And he hadn't told any one exactly what it was.

The Grouse boys and the Woodchuck brothers gave a concert that very night. You see, Mr. Fox had taught them to make music like a fife-and-drum corps—the Grouse boys drummed and the Woodchuck brothers whistled. And whenever they gave a concert, almost everybody went to it.

Well, when the forest-people reached the hollow where the concert was to be given, there was Peter Mink, all smiles. He stepped up to each newcomer and said:

"Check your hat and coat?"

Some of the forest-people didn't know what he meant, until Peter explained to them that he would take care of hats, coats, umbrellas, walking-sticks, or anything else that anybody might like to leave with him during the concert.

"How are you going to find my hat, if I leave it with you?" Mr. Rabbit asked.

Peter Mink showed him a heap of oak leaves.

"I'll tear one of these in two," he said, "give you half of it, and stick the other half inside your hatband. When the concert is over and you come away, all you have to do is to hand me your half of the oak leaf and I'll see which piece matches it among those that I have kept. And the hat in which the other half happens to be stuck must be your hat. Do you understand? It's quite simple," Peter said.

Mr. Rabbit said that he understood, and that it was a good idea, too. But he thought he'd keep his hat with him.

Then his wife said to him in a low voice that he ought to do whatever he could to help Peter Mink.

"Now that Peter has gone to work," she told her husband, "everyone ought to encourage him. And I want you to leave your hat with him. I'll have him check my spectacles, as he calls it," Mrs. Rabbit added, "for I shall not need them. I can hear exactly as well without them."

Mr. Rabbit always tried to please his wife. So he let Peter Mink check his hat. But he felt uncomfortable during the whole concert. It was a new hat. And he didn't like the thought of losing it.

That same thing happened in a good many families. Most of the gentlemen said that Peter's idea was a good one, but they thought they would wait till another time. And their wives generally persuaded them to let Peter Mink check something, just to help him along.

But Uncle Jerry Chuck refused to leave a single thing with Peter. He said he had had his hat for a great many years.

The music was not so good as usual that night. And when the fife-and-drum corps played "Pop! Goes the Weasel!"—which was their favorite tune, and the first they had ever learned—they had to stop in the middle of it three times, and begin again, because there were so many interruptions. People kept standing up in their seats and looking around to see if Peter Mink was still there. And almost everybody except Uncle Jerry Chuck seemed worried.

But Uncle Jerry had a fine time. You see, whenever the fifers and drummers had to stop, and begin again, Uncle Jerry felt he was getting more music. And he enjoyed it especially because he had found his ticket in the woods and didn't have to pay for it. And on account of what happened when the concert was over, Uncle Jerry was even happier the next day.



XIV Uncle Jerry Helps

The concert given by the Grouse boys and the Woodchuck brothers came to an end early. Billy Woodchuck, who was one of the fifers—because he was such a good whistler—made a short speech.

"We shall have to stop now," he said, "because so many people keep bobbing up and looking around that they make us nervous. Maybe the piece we just played didn't sound quite right. So I want to explain that each of us was playing a different tune, we were so upset. And, of course, we can't keep on." Then he made a low bow.

All at once there was a great rush toward the place where Peter Mink was waiting, with the hats and sticks, umbrellas and spectacles, coats and rubbers, and other things that he had checked for the people who came to the concert.

When Peter Mink saw everybody hurrying up all at the same time the smile faded from his face.

"Don't crowd!" he begged them. "There's something here for everybody." He took the half oak leaf that Mr. Rabbit handed to him and hunted around until he found another half that seemed to match it. And since that other half was stuck in an old umbrella, he gave the umbrella to Mr. Rabbit.

"But I didn't leave an umbrella with you. I left a hat!" Mr. Rabbit cried.

Peter Mink shook his head.

"You must be mistaken," he replied. "You said yourself my idea was a good one, you remember."

Now, Mr. Rabbit didn't intend to lose his new hat. So he began to hunt for it, though Peter Mink told him to stand back.

That was only the first of a number of disputes. There was Mr. Woodchuck—he had left his favorite walking-stick with Peter; and all he received in its place was one worn-out rubber and one mitten with a hole in it.

Old Mr. Crow made a terrible noise when Peter Mink tried to make him take an overcoat that was at least four times too big for him. And Peter insisted on attempting to squeeze Fatty Coon into a coat that was twenty-three sizes too small for him, and which really belonged to Sandy Chipmunk.

There was such an uproar, with all the people complaining, and trying to find their own things, that Peter Mink began to think he had better leave before he found himself in worse trouble. So he slipped away. And nobody noticed that he was gone, because there was such confusion.

It was a long time before everybody went home. And even then there were many who weren't satisfied. For instance, there was Mrs. Rabbit. To be sure, she found a pair of spectacles. But they weren't the ones she had given Peter. And she couldn't see through them very well.

Uncle Jerry Chuck did everything he could to help. He pushed right in where the crowd was thickest and pawed over everything he could find. There were some unkind people who objected, and said that he had no business there, because Peter Mink had checked nothing for him.

But that made no difference to Uncle Jerry. He wouldn't leave until he was ready to go. And the next day he appeared in a brand new hat. He said that his old one had really become shabby. But whenever anyone asked him where he got his new hat he pretended not to hear, and hurried away. And after that people liked him even less than they had before.

As for Peter Mink, he never tried to work again. Some of the forest-people said that he had never meant to work, anyhow. They claimed that he had mixed up everything on purpose, to play a trick on people. And for a long time no one saw Peter Mink in that neighborhood.

Mr. Rabbit said that that was the only pleasant part of the whole affair.



XV Peter's New Coat

Perhaps you never heard how Mr. Mink lost his tail in the woods, and how Jimmy Rabbit found it and wore it until Mr. Mink came along and took the tail away from him.

Peter Mink knew all about it, anyhow, for Mr. Mink was his uncle. And Peter knew that Jimmy Rabbit was still on the lookout for a fine, bushy tail.

So one day when Peter met Jimmy Rabbit he told Jimmy that if he would go to a certain place, near Broad Brook, he might find something that would interest him.

"You'll find a small place where the earth has been stirred up," Peter said, "if you look exactly where I tell you to. There's something hidden there. And I won't say just what it is. It might be a tail; and then again, it might not," Peter told him. "Anyhow, if you go and dig in that spot, I know you won't hurry away, when you find what's there."

Now, Jimmy Rabbit ought to have known Peter Mink well enough to suspect that there was something wrong. But the moment he heard the word "tail" he couldn't start for Broad Brook fast enough.

It took him some time to find the place Peter Mink had described, for a light snow had covered the ground. But at last Jimmy discovered the loose earth, exactly as Peter had said.

Jimmy Rabbit was just going to begin to dig when someone called his name. And he jumped back quickly and looked all around. At first he could see no one. But after a moment he saw someone beckoning to him. It was Paddy Muskrat. He had crawled out of the brook just in time to stop Jimmy Rabbit before it was too late.

"What are you going to do?" Paddy Muskrat asked.

"I'm going to dig in this dirt," Jimmy explained. "I believe there's a tail hidden there. I need one, you know. And Peter Mink told me——"

"Peter Mink!" Paddy interrupted. "I'd advise you to have nothing to do with Peter Mink. Because sooner or later he'll get you into trouble.... Do you know what's hidden beneath that dirt? I'll tell you: it's a trap! Johnnie Green set it there, thinking he could catch *me* in it. But I saw him when he buried it. And I wouldn't go near it for anything."

As soon as Jimmy heard the word "trap" he couldn't get away from that place fast enough. He turned and ran off in great bounds; and he never even stopped to thank Paddy Muskrat for warning him. Now, that was not like Jimmy at all. But you see, he was frightened.

Paddy Muskrat was a wise little chap. And though he had said he wouldn't go near the trap for anything, he thought it was about time somebody fixed the trap so it couldn't do any harm. And very carefully he scraped the dirt away from it.

"There!" he said to himself. "Now everybody can see it. And no one will get caught." Then he jumped into Broad Brook again and swam away.

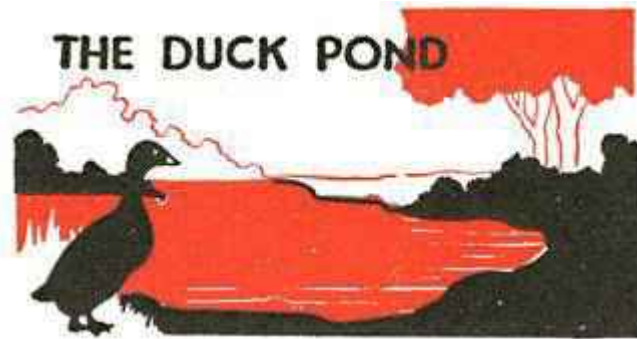
Not long afterwards a slim figure came stealing through the woods. It was Peter Mink; and he had a bag in his hand. He expected to use the bag, too. For he was very sure that he would find Jimmy Rabbit fast in the trap and he intended to put him in the bag and drag him away.

Peter was disappointed when he saw that the trap was empty. And he wondered what had happened.

"Well, here's the bag, anyhow," he said to himself. "I've got that!" And he sat down and made a hole in the bag for his head, and two more for his arms, and drew the bag on. It fitted him very well.

"Why, here I've a new coat!" he said. "I see now that the bag would have been much too small to hold Jimmy Rabbit. So it's just as well he didn't get caught in the trap."

And Peter Mink walked away. He liked his new coat. But probably it wasn't the kind you would care for at all.

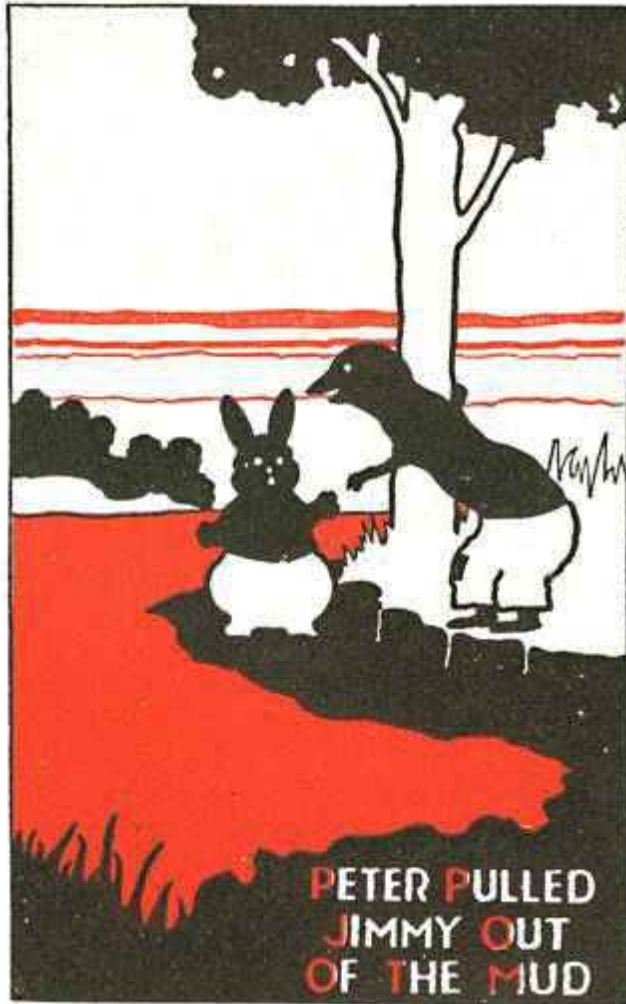


XVI The Duck Pond

Sometimes Peter Mink grew tired of not knowing where he was going to sleep. And now and then, when he happened to be in some neighborhood that he liked, he would try to find a place where he might stay until he felt like roaming on again.

There was one neighborhood that Peter liked very much. He often said that of all the places in Pleasant Valley that he knew anything about, there was no other as charming as Farmer Green's duck pond.

The reason for his thinking that was that he was especially fond of duck meat. And, of course, it was convenient to be able to swim under water, and steal upon a fat duck, and seize her before she knew that Peter was anywhere near.



Now, Peter Mink learned that there was a muskrat who had built him a house in the bank of the duck pond. And as soon as Peter found out where the muskrat's home was, he drove away the owner and began to live in the house himself.

He found it very comfortable. And he caught a duck every day, until at last Farmer Green noticed that his ducks were disappearing.

"I believe it's a mink that's taking them," Farmer Green said to his son Johnnie. "If it was a coon, he'd steal more than just one a day.... Now, you take the old gun and go down to the pond and hide. And when I let the ducks go out for their swim, I want you to watch for a mink."

Naturally, Peter Mink didn't hear what Farmer Green said. If he had, no doubt he would have left the muskrat's house at once and moved on to some other neighborhood.

Early the next morning Johnnie Green put the old gun on his shoulder and stole down to the edge of the duck pond, where he hid among some cat-tails. He kept his sharp eyes on the bank of the pond, for the ducks were just waddling down from the barnyard, to enjoy their morning swim.

As sharp as Johnnie's eyes were, they did not see Peter Mink as he crept out of his house and stretched himself in the sun. Peter had fallen into the habit of sleeping late and awaking each morning just as the ducks reached the pond.

He saw them as they picked their way down the bank. And for once he didn't seem to care anything about them. To tell the truth, he had breakfasted on duck so often that he had at last grown a bit tired of duck meat. And now he thought that for a change an eel would taste good. For the first time since Peter had driven the muskrat from his home the ducks were safe.

Peter paid no attention to them. And unnoticed by Johnnie Green, he slipped into the water and swam quickly to a place in the pond where there was a warm spring. He knew that the warm water rose to the top of the pond. And he knew, as well, that if an eel should happen to swim over the spring, the rising water would bear him to the surface of the duck pond.

Peter Mink must have been a lucky fellow. For he had hardly reached the spring when he saw an eel right in front of him. He seized the eel and swam toward the bank. And there was such a commotion in the water that Johnnie Green couldn't help noticing it.

You see, the eel did not want to leave the duck pond. He had always lived there, and he liked it, too. So he twisted and squirmed, trying his hardest to break away from Peter Mink.

But Peter swam steadily on, though to be sure he couldn't swim very fast, dragging such a slippery fellow along with him.

But finally he reached the shore. And then he pulled the eel out of the water.

Still the eel tried to get away from him. He wound himself about Peter Mink. And several times he managed to throw Peter head over heels. But Peter Mink always rushed upon the eel again before he could wriggle into the pond.

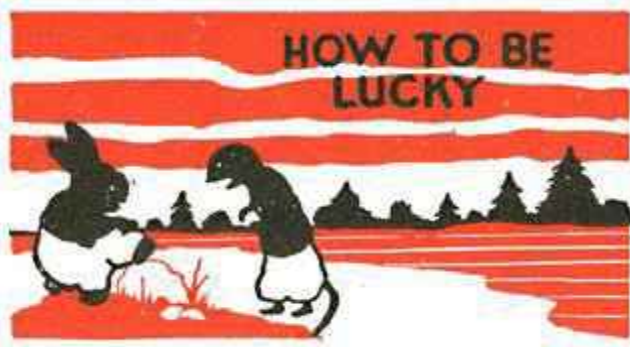
All this time Johnnie Green had entirely forgotten about his gun. He had never seen such a sight before. And he looked on with staring eyes, until at last Peter dragged the eel away from the pond and into some bushes.

Then Johnnie Green remembered why his father had sent him down to the duck pond. And he ran forward, all ready to shoot.

But Peter Mink had vanished. He had heard Johnnie running; and that was enough to send him skipping away.

Peter was disappointed, because he lost his breakfast. And Johnnie Green was disappointed, because he lost Peter.

In fact, of all those present, the ducks seemed to be the only ones that were really contented. They had a fine swim. And when night came, not one of them was missing.



XVII How To Be Lucky

There was one thing that Peter Mink couldn't understand. No matter how hard he tried to get Jimmy Rabbit into trouble, Jimmy always managed to escape. Peter wondered what the reason might be. And one day he said to Jimmy:

"Why is it that you're always able to get out of a scrape?"

"Don't you know?" Jimmy Rabbit asked him. "I thought everybody knew that.... *It's because I'm lucky.*"

"Oh, I know that!" said Peter Mink. "What I'd like to know is what makes you so lucky?"

"I supposed everybody knew that, too," Jimmy Rabbit answered. "*It's because I have the left hind-foot of a rabbit.*"

Peter Mink answered that he didn't see what that had to do with being lucky.

"You ask anybody about it," Jimmy told him. "There's Mr. Crow, over on the fence. Go and ask him why I'm lucky."

So Peter Mink went over to the fence where Mr. Crow was resting, and put the question to him.

"Oh, ask me something hard!" Mr. Crow cried. "That's too easy. Everybody knows that one."

For once Peter Mink remembered the word Jimmy Rabbit had taught him when he was caught beneath the big log.

"Please!" he said. "I'd really like to know, Mr. Crow!"

"Left hind-foot!" Mr. Crow replied briefly. "It's a rabbit's, you know; and there's nothing like 'em to bring luck."

That set Peter Mink to thinking. He couldn't help wishing that he might have Jimmy's left hind-foot for himself. It ought to bring luck to him, he thought, just as it did to Jimmy Rabbit.

After Peter Mink had thought the matter over for some time, he said to Jimmy:

"I wish you'd come over to the creek with me. There's something there that I want to show you. Of course, it's a long way off; and maybe your mother wouldn't like to have you go so far from home."

"I'll come!" Jimmy Rabbit said quickly.

"Maybe you'd better ask your mother first," Peter suggested.

But Jimmy Rabbit shook his head.

"That wouldn't do any good," he replied. "Let's be on our way!"

So Peter Mink started off toward the creek, with Jimmy close behind him.

At last they reached the bank of the creek. The water was low. And before them was a stretch of mud, which looked dry and firm. There were a few weeds growing in it. And it certainly looked harmless enough.

"What is it you're going to show me?" Jimmy asked.

"Follow me!" said Peter Mink. "You'll see pretty soon what it is." And he jumped off the bank and landed lightly on his feet on the mud-flat, and started on again.

It never once entered Jimmy Rabbit's head that there could be any danger. So he jumped off the bank, too. And to his great surprise his legs sank entirely out of sight in the mud.

You see, he was at least four times heavier than Peter Mink. And when he landed on the thin, sun-baked crust that covered the mud-flat he had broken through it.

Jimmy Rabbit had a terrible feeling that he was going right down until the mud closed over his head.

"Help!" he shrieked. "Help! Help!"

But Peter Mink walked straight on. He never once looked around.

And though Jimmy Rabbit called and called, he couldn't seem to make Peter Mink hear him.



XVIII The Bargain

Stuck fast in the mud as he was, Jimmy Rabbit couldn't do a thing except shout. Or you might spy there were only two things he could do—shouting being one of them, and keeping still being the other.

At first, Jimmy couldn't help calling out at the top of his lungs. But Peter Mink, you remember, didn't appear to hear him. And there seemed to be no one else near. After a time Jimmy Rabbit grew so hoarse that he stopped shouting for help and tried to think of some way in which he might escape.

It occurred to him that if he could only manage to get his left hind-foot free of the mud (that was his lucky foot, you know) perhaps he would be able to crawl out, somehow. With his lucky foot buried deep

in the mud, and quite out of sight, Jimmy thought it was not at all strange that he had not been able to free himself.

So he tried to raise his left hind-foot. At first the mud actually seemed to suck it deeper, as he tried. But after a long time Jimmy succeeded in lifting that foot the least bit. And he was pleased—until he discovered that his other hind-foot had only sunk further into the mire.

At last he happened to look up. And there on the bank, gazing down at him, stood Peter Mink.

"What are you doing down there?" Peter Mink called. "Why didn't you follow me, as I told you to?"

"I fell into this mud," Jimmy Rabbit told him. "And I called and called to you. Couldn't you hear me?"

"The wind was blowing," said Peter—and anyone can see that *that* was no answer at all.

"Well, if you'd looked around, you could have seen what happened to me," Jimmy Rabbit complained.

"The sun was shining in my eyes," Peter Mink told him—and I shouldn't say that this answer of Peter's was any better than the first.

"Well—you can help me out of this bog, anyhow," Jimmy Rabbit said. "So please give me your hand. I'm pretty tired of being stuck here."

But Peter Mink never stirred. "Where's your lucky left hind-foot?" he asked. "I should think *that* could help you out, if anything could."

"The trouble is," said Jimmy Rabbit, "my left hind-foot is so deep in this mire that I can't pull it up where it can do me any good at all. It's the first time I've ever known it to fail me. And you can't really blame the foot, either, for it hasn't a chance. I don't suppose it even knows what a fix I'm in."

Still Peter Mink made no move.

"What are you waiting for?" Jimmy inquired. "I've been here long enough."

"Maybe you have—for you," said Peter Mink. "But you haven't been there long enough to suit me." And he pretended to start to go away.

Jimmy Rabbit called to him.

"I'll give you something, if you'll help me," he said.

Peter turned around.

"There's just one thing you can give me," he said, "that will make me willing to pull you out of the mud."

"What's that?" Jimmy asked him.

"Your left hind-foot!" Peter Mink told him. "I need a lucky foot. I'm always getting into trouble of some sort and a rabbit's left hind-foot would be a great help to me—unless I happened to get stuck in the mud," he added with a sly smile. Jimmy Rabbit knew then that Peter Mink had meant all the time to lead him into that mud. He knew that Peter had meant all the time to get his left hind-foot away from him. But he didn't let Peter Mink know that he knew.

"You can have my left hind-foot," Jimmy Rabbit said, "on two conditions. You must always carry it in your pocket, and you have to agree to take—along with the foot—all the luck and everything else that goes with it."

Peter Mink quickly agreed to that.

And Jimmy Rabbit said it was a bargain, and that something awful always happened to people that didn't stand by their bargains.

Well, after that Peter jumped down and pulled Jimmy Rabbit out of the mud.

"Now," said Peter Mink, as soon as they had climbed up the bank again, "the next thing to do is to cut off your left hind-foot." And he was much surprised when Jimmy Rabbit began to laugh. "I don't see anything funny about it," Peter Mink growled.

"Of course you don't," said Jimmy. "I didn't expect you to. And I don't expect you're going to cut my foot off, because *you agreed not to.*"

"I never did anything of the kind!" Peter Mink shouted.

"Well, we'll go and ask Mr. Crow what he thinks about it," Jimmy Rabbit said. "We'll leave it to him."



XIX Settling a Dispute

While Jimmy Rabbit was looking for wise old Mr. Crow, Peter Mink stuck close behind him.

"You needn't think you can run away with *my* rabbit's lucky left hind-foot," Peter kept saying. "That's *my* foot! You promised to give it to me for helping you out of the mud. And I intend to have it. I'm going to follow you wherever you go. I wish you'd try to be a little more careful where you step with my foot."

But Jimmy Rabbit didn't seem the least bit worried.

"You stand by your bargain, and I'll stand by mine," he told Peter. And that was all he would say.

At last Jimmy found Mr. Crow. And as soon as Peter Mink spied him he hurried up and began to complain to Mr. Crow that Jimmy Rabbit wouldn't stand by his bargain.

"What was it?" Mr. Crow asked.

"He promised to give me his left hind-foot, if I'd pull him out of the creek," said Peter Mink.

"Did he pull you out?" Mr. Crow asked Jimmy Rabbit.

And Jimmy admitted that Peter had helped him out.

"He helped me in, too," added Jimmy. "But I didn't have to pay him for doing that."

"You're out of order!" Mr. Crow told Jimmy sharply.

And looking down at his mud-stained clothes, Jimmy Rabbit said that he supposed he was.

"Can you repeat the exact words of the bargain?" Mr. Crow asked Peter Mink.

"Yes," Peter began. "He said——"

"That will do!" Mr. Crow cautioned him. "I said, '*Can* you repeat them?' I didn't *tell* you to repeat them, did I?"

"No," Peter Mink admitted.

"I advise you to be very careful," Mr. Crow warned him. Then Mr. Crow turned to Jimmy Rabbit.

"Can *you* repeat the exact words of the bargain?" he asked.

"Yes, sir!" said Jimmy Rabbit promptly.

"Good!" Mr. Crow exclaimed. "I'll settle this dispute in no time. Now, I want you, Jimmy Rabbit, to whisper the exact words in my *right* ear, while Peter Mink whispers the exact words in my *left* one. In that way I shall know at once if there's anybody that isn't telling the truth."

Mr. Crow was very particular. He made Peter and Jimmy begin at the same time. And he said that if they both told the truth it seemed to him that they ought to *finish* at the same time, too.

And that's just the way it happened!

"I don't see what the dispute is," said Mr. Crow. "You both agree. And how can two people have a dispute, when they agree perfectly? The only difference I noticed in your stories was that Peter whispered much louder than Jimmy."

"The trouble," Peter Mink cried, "the trouble is, he won't let me cut off his left hind-foot!"

Mr. Crow looked astonished.

"And why should he?" he exclaimed. "You agreed to take, along with the foot, all the luck and *everything else that goes with it*. And if the rest of Jimmy Rabbit doesn't go with his left hind-foot, why—I should like to know what does!"

Peter Mink looked very sour. But pretty soon he brightened up.

"All right!" he said. "I get the whole of him, then—don't I?"

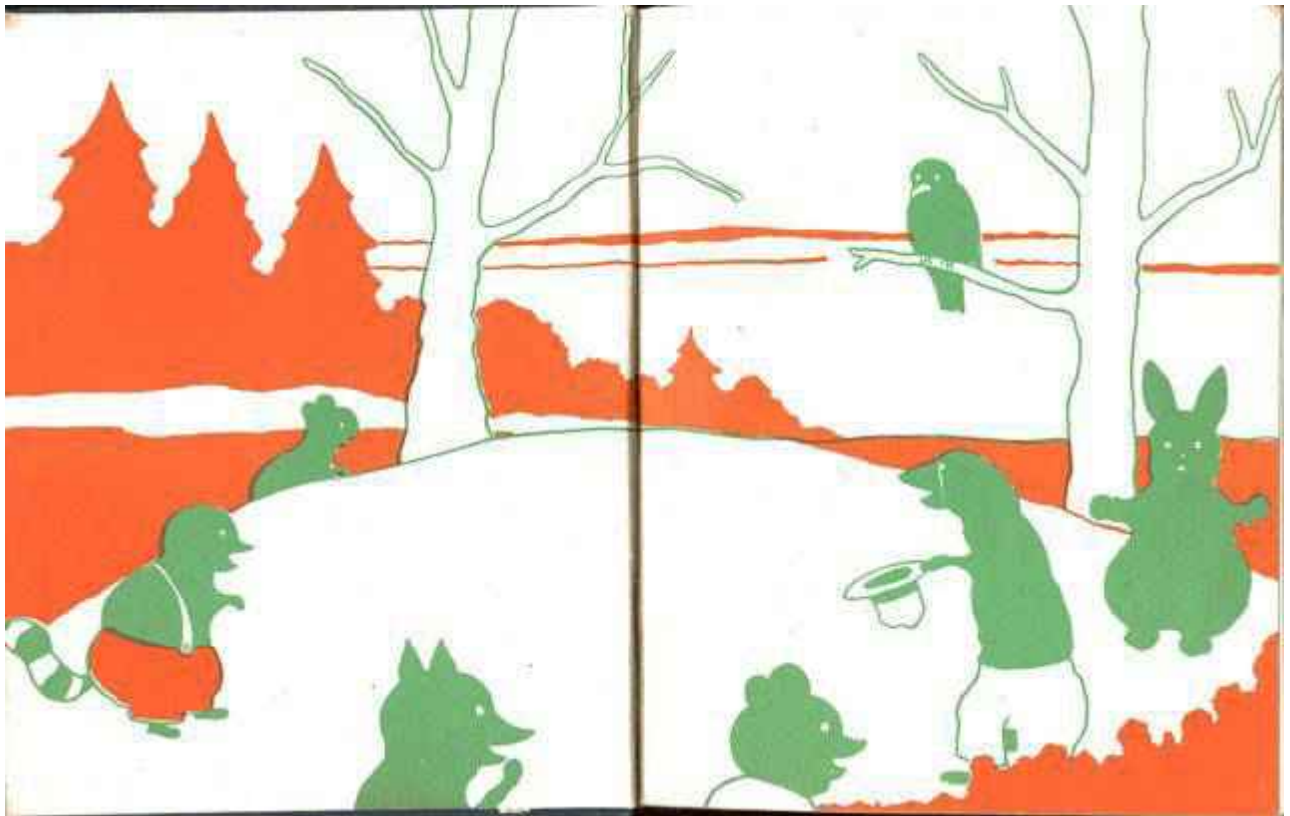
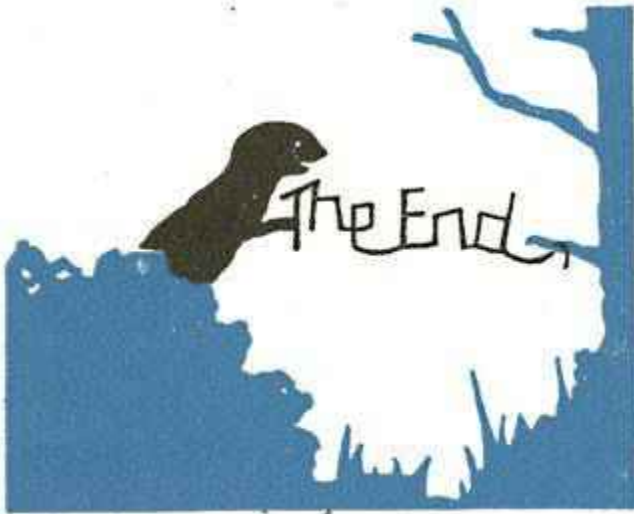
"You certainly do," said Mr. Crow. "And what's more, you have to *carry him in your pocket*, for that was part of the bargain."

Now, when you stop to remember that Jimmy Rabbit was four times bigger than Peter Mink, you can understand how angry Peter must have been. He saw right away that such a thing was impossible.

"I can't do that!" he cried.

"Then I declare the agreement to be broken," said Mr. Crow. "And I advise Jimmy Rabbit to run home at once, for I happen to know that his mother is looking for him."

Afterward, Peter Mink always claimed that there was no use trying to get the better of anybody that had the left hind-foot of a rabbit. He said that they certainly were lucky, and that he knew what he was talking about.



Front endpapers

