Tuck-Me-In Tales & Other Stories

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Table of Contents

The Tale of Jolly Robin	1
The Tale of Paddy Muskrat	47
The Tale of Solomon Owl	89
The Tale of Reddy Woodpecker	137
The Tale of Chirpy Cricket	187
The Tale of Old Dog Spot	237

Oak Meadow iii



The Tale of Jolly Robin

Chapter 1: The Nestlings	. 3
Chapter 2: Learning to Fly	. 5
Chapter 3: The Wide, Wide World	. 7
Chapter 4: What Jolly Did Best	. 9
Chapter 5: Laughing for Mr. Crow	. 11
Chapter 6: Tickling a Nose	. 13
Chapter 7: A New Way to Travel	. 15
Chapter 8: Jolly Is Left Behind	. 17
Chapter 9: Jolly's Mistake	. 19
Chapter 10: The White Giant	. 21
Chapter 11: What a Snowball Did	. 23
Chapter 12: Jolly Feels Better	. 25
Chapter 13: The Hermit	. 27
Chapter 14: One or Two Blunders	. 29
Chapter 15: Lost—A Cousin!	. 31
Chapter 16: Jealous Jasper Jay	. 33
Chapter 17: Only a Rooster	. 35
Chapter 18: On Top of the Barn	. 37
Chapter 19: Curious Mr. Crow	. 39
Chapter 20: The Four-Armed Man	. 41
Chapter 21: A Doleful Ditty	. 43
Chapter 22: Shocking Manners	. 45



The Nestlings

Of course, there was a time, once, when Jolly Robin was just a nestling himself. With two brothers and one sister—all of them, like him, much spotted with black—Jolly lived in a house in one of Farmer Green's apple trees. The house was made of grass and leaves, plastered on the inside with mud, and lined with softer, finer grass, which his mother had chosen with the greatest care.

But Jolly never paid much attention to his first home. What interested him more than anything else was food. From dawn until dark, he was always cheeping for something to eat. And since the other children were just as hungry as he was, those four growing babies kept their parents busy finding food for them. It was then that Jolly Robin learned to like angleworms. And though he greedily ate insects and bugs, as well as wild berries, he liked angleworms best.

Jolly and his sister and his brothers could always tell when their father or their mother brought home some dainty, because the moment the parent lighted upon the limb where the nest was built they could feel their home sink slightly, from the added weight upon the branch. Then the youngsters would set up a loud squalling, with a great craning of necks and stretching of orange-colored mouths.

Sometimes, when the dainty was especially big, Mr. or Mrs. Robin would say, "Cuck! Cuck!" That meant "Open wide!" But they seldom found it necessary to give that order.

Somehow, Jolly Robin managed to eat more than the rest of the nestlings, and so he grew faster than the others. He soon learned a few tricks, too. For instance, if Mrs. Robin happened to be sitting on the nest, to keep her family warm, while waiting for Mr. Robin to return with lunch for the children, Jolly had a trick that he played on his mother, in case she didn't move off the nest fast enough to suit him.

He would whisper to the rest of the children. And then they would jostle their fond parent, lifting her up above them, and sometimes almost upsetting her, so that she had hard work to keep from falling off the nest.

Mrs. Robin did not like that trick very much. But she knew that Jolly would not annoy her with it long. Indeed, he was only eleven days old when he left his birthplace and went out into the wide world. You see, the young folk grew so fast that they soon more than filled the house. So there was nothing their parents could do but persuade them to leave home and learn to fly.

One day, therefore, Mr. Robin did not bring his children's food to the edge of the nest and drop it into their mouths. Instead, he stood on the limb a little distance away from them and showed them a plump angleworm.

The sight of that dainty was more than Jolly Robin could resist. He scrambled boldly out of the nest, and tottering up to his father on his wobbling legs, he snatched the tempting morsel out of his proud parent's bill.

Jolly never went back to the nest after that. The next day Mrs. Robin coaxed the other children from home in the same fashion. And though it may seem a heartless act, it was really the best thing that could have happened to Jolly and his sister and his brothers.

You see, they had to learn to fly. And so long as they stayed in the nest they could never learn a difficult feat like flying.





Learning to Fly

After Jolly Robin had gulped down the fat angleworm with which his father had coaxed him to leave the nest, he clung desperately to the limb. With no food in sight he had plenty of time to look about him and to be alarmed.

The day was not gone before he had a great fright. He tumbled out of the apple tree and fell squawking and fluttering upon the ground. Luckily, his mother happened to be at home. She went to Jolly at once and told him not to be afraid.

"Nothing will hurt you," she said, "if you'll only keep still. But if you squall like that, the cat will find you."

It may seem strange, but his mother's words frightened Jolly all the more. They scared him so thoroughly that he stopped making any noise at all. And that was how he learned never to talk when he was on the ground near a house where a cat might live.

"Now," said Jolly's mother, as soon as he was still, "I'll teach you a new game. Just watch me!" And spreading her wings, she flapped them, and sprang into the air.

Soon Jolly was trying to imitate her. And it was not long before he found himself gliding a short distance, skimming along just off the ground.

But in spite of all his efforts, he couldn't help falling again. Though his mother tried to show him how to fly into a treetop, Jolly Robin seemed unable to learn the trick.

At last Mr. Robin said to his wife, "I'll teach him the rest. You've made a good beginning. But he must learn more at once. There's no telling when the cat may come into the orchard to hunt for field mice. And you know what would happen then."

His wife shuddered. But Mr. Robin told her not to worry. "I'll soon have this youngster so he can fly as well as anybody," he declared.

So he went and hopped about on the ground with Jolly for a little while, showing him how to find worms beneath the grass carpet of the orchard.

And then, in a loud voice, Mr. Robin suddenly cried, "The cat! The cat!" And he flew into a nearby old tree.

Jolly Robin had never seen Farmer Green's cat. But he had heard that she was a dreadful, fierce creature. And when his father shouted her name, Jolly was so startled that he forgot he didn't quite know how to fly. Before he knew what he was doing, he followed his father right up into the old apple tree and perched himself on a low branch.

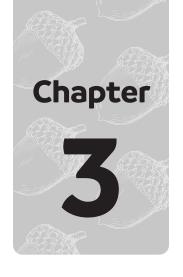
That was the way he learned to fly, for he never had the least trouble with it afterward. And as soon as he realized that he had actually flown from the ground to the bough, he was so pleased that he began to laugh merrily.

As for the cat, she was not in the orchard at all. Indeed, Jolly's father had not said that she was. You see, he had played a joke on his son.

Now, up to that time Jolly Robin had not been named. You must remember that he was not yet two weeks old. And having three other children of the same age, his parents had not been able to think of names for all of them.

But this big youngster laughed so heartily that his father named him "Jolly," on the spot. And "Jolly" he remained ever afterward.





The Wide, Wide World

After Jolly Robin learned to fly, his father took him into the woods to spend each night in a roost where there were many other young robins, whose fathers had likewise brought them there.

Jolly learned a great deal from being with so many new friends. It was not long before he could find plenty of food for himself, without help from anyone.

He discovered, too, that there was safety in numbers. For example, if Jasper Jay made too great a nuisance of himself by bullying a young robin, a mob of robins could easily put Jasper to flight.

"Always help other people!" That was a motto that all the youngsters had to learn. And another was this: "Follow your father's lead!"

Later in the season, in October, when the robin cousins and uncles and aunts and sisters and brothers and all the rest of the relatives made their long journey to their winter homes in the South, Jolly found that there was a good reason for such rules. If he hadn't followed his father then he might have lost his way, because, since it was the first time he had ever been out of Pleasant Valley, he knew nothing whatever about traveling.

He looked forward with much interest to the journey, for as the days grew shorter he heard a great deal of talk about the trip among his elders. And while he was waiting for the day when they should leave, he became acquainted with many new and delicious morsels to eat. He roamed about picking wild grapes, mulberries, and elderberries. And he did not scorn a large, green katydid when he chanced to find one.

There was always some new dainty to be sampled, though as the weather grew colder, Jolly began to understand that in winter Pleasant Valley would not be so fine a place to live.

However, he managed to find food enough so that he continued to grow rapidly. The night after he found a mountain ash on a hillside, full of bright red berries, his father said that he seemed much taller than he had been that morning.

"You must have eaten a great many of those berries," said Mr. Robin.

"Well, I notice one thing," Jolly observed. "My waistcoat is fast losing its black spots. And it's redder than it was. The red berries certainly colored it in some way."

Mr. Robin replied that he had never heard of such a thing happening. He looked curiously at his son's waistcoat. "It does seem to look different," he said. "It's brighter than it was."

Really, that was only because Jolly was fast growing up. But neither he nor his father stopped to think of that. And since Jolly had learned that motto, "Follow your father's lead," he thought his waistcoat ought to be just as red as old Mr. Robin's was.

So Jolly visited the mountain ash each day and fairly stuffed himself with the bright red fruit. It did him no harm, anyhow. And he enjoyed eating it.

And the next spring, when Jolly Robin returned to Pleasant Valley, after spending the winter in the South, there was not a redder waistcoat than his in all the neighborhood.





What Jolly Did Best

Jolly Robin had something on his mind. For several days he had been turning a certain matter over in his head. But in spite of all his thinking, he seemed unable to find any answer to the question that was troubling him. So at last he decided he would have to ask somebody to help him.

And that was why Jolly stopped Jimmy Rabbit near the garden one day.

"I want your advice," he told Jimmy Rabbit.

"Certainly!" that young gentleman replied. And he sat himself down upon his wheelbarrow and looked very earnest. "If it's anything about gardening," he said, "I should advise you to raise cabbages, by all means."

But Jolly Robin said he wasn't thinking of planting a garden.

"In fact," he explained, "the trouble is, I don't know what to do. I'd like to have some regular work, you know. And since you've had a good deal of experience, having run a tooth-pulling parlor, a barber shop, and a shoe store, I thought you might be able to tell me what would be a good business for me to take up."

For a few minutes Jimmy Rabbit did not speak. But he nodded his head wisely.

"Let me see!" he said at last. "What's the thing you do best?"

Jolly Robin replied at once that he thought he could fly better than he could do anything else. And he felt so happy, because he was sure Jimmy Rabbit was going to help him, that he began to laugh gaily. And he couldn't help singing a snatch of a new song he had heard that morning. And then he laughed again.

"You're mistaken," Jimmy Rabbit said to him. "You fly well enough, I dare say. But there are others who can beat you at flying. No!" he declared. "What you can do better than anybody I know is to laugh. And if I were you I should make laughing my regular business."

That idea struck Jolly Robin as being so funny that he laughed harder than ever.

And Jimmy Rabbit nodded his head again, as if to say, "I'm right and I know it!"

At last Jolly Robin stopped laughing long enough to ask Jimmy to explain how anyone could make a business of laughing. "I don't see how it could be done," said Jolly Robin.

"Why, it's simple enough!" Jimmy told him. "All you need do is to find somebody who will hire you to laugh for him. There are people, you know, who find it very difficult to laugh. I should think they'd be glad to pay somebody to do their laughing for them."

"Name someone!" Jolly Robin urged him.

And Jimmy Rabbit did. "There's old Mr. Crow!" he said. "You know how solemn he is. It's positively painful to hear him try to laugh at a joke. I'm sure he would be delighted with this idea. And if I were you, I'd see him before somebody else does."

Jolly Robin looked puzzled. "Who would ever think of such a thing but you?" he asked.

"Nobody!" Jimmy Rabbit replied. "But I like the scheme so well that I almost wish I hadn't mentioned it. And unless you make your bargain with old Mr. Crow at once I may decide to go into the laughing business myself. My advice to you," he said, "is to hurry!"

So Jolly Robin thanked him. And then he flew away to find old Mr. Crow.

Of course, he went to the cornfield first.





Laughing for Mr. Crow

Sure enough, old Mr. Crow was in the cornfield. And though he was feeling somewhat peevish that morning, because a racoon had disturbed his rest the night before, he listened to what Jolly Robin had to say.

"I've come to ask you a question," Jolly told him. "I've decided to go into business—the laughing business. And I want to inquire if you wouldn't like to engage me to do your laughing for you."

Well, that struck old Mr. Crow as being very funny. He forgot all about his loss of sleep. And his eye twinkled quite merrily. He tried to laugh, too; but it was a pitiful attempt—no more than a hoarse cackle, which was, as Jimmy Rabbit had said, positively painful. Old Mr. Crow seemed to realize that he was making a very queer sound. He hastily turned his laugh into a cough and pretended that he had a kernel of corn stuck in his throat.

"What are your prices?" he asked Jolly Robin. "Are you going to charge by the day or by the laugh?" "Just as you prefer!" Jolly answered.

"Well, I'll have to think about it," old Mr. Crow told him. "It's a question that I wouldn't care to decide in a hurry. If I paid you by the day you might not laugh at all. And if I paid you by the laugh you might laugh all the time. It would be pretty expensive, either way. And I don't believe I'd like that."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Jolly Robin then. "I'll stay with you one day for nothing. And we'll see how the arrangement suits us."

That suggestion pleased Mr. Crow. "Agreed!" he said quickly. "And now," he added, "you may laugh for me, because I am quite delighted."

So Jolly Robin laughed happily. And old Mr. Crow remarked that it was a fair laugh, though not so loud as he would have liked.

"I'll do better next time," Jolly assured him.

"Good!" said Mr. Crow. "And now, since I've finished my breakfast, we'll go over to the woods and see what's going on there this morning."

The first person they saw in the woods was Peter Mink. He was fishing for trout in Broad Brook. And old Mr. Crow, as soon as he spied him, sang out, "How many of Farmer Green's fish have you eaten this morning?"

Peter Mink was just crawling out of the water, with a fish in his mouth. When he heard Mr. Crow calling to him, he dropped his trout upon a rock and looked up quickly. "How much of Farmer Green's corn have you stolen for your breakfast?" he cried.

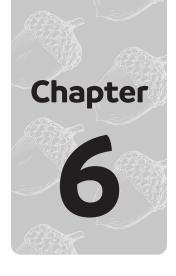
At that Jolly Robin began to laugh. But Mr. Crow stopped him quickly. "Don't laugh!" the old gentleman squawked. "There's nothing to laugh at, so far as I can see."

So Jolly managed to smother his laughter, for he noticed that Mr. Crow was angry.

"You'll have to be careful," Mr. Crow warned him. "You mustn't laugh at the wrong time, you know."

"I'll do my best," Jolly Robin promised. And he could see already that old Mr. Crow was going to be hard to please.





Tickling a Nose

Old Mr. Crow did not want to stay near the brook to talk with Peter Mink. Calling to Jolly Robin to follow him, he flapped his way to the edge of the woods and sat in a tree overlooking the pasture.

"Here comes Tommy Fox!" Mr. Crow exclaimed. "We ought to have some fun with him. So when it's time for you to laugh for me, don't forget to laugh loudly."

"I'll remember," Jolly promised him. And just by way of practice he chirruped so merrily that Tommy Fox pricked up his ears and came bounding up to the tree where Jolly and Mr. Crow were sitting.

"Good morning!" Mr. Crow cried to Tommy. "Is that a hen's feather that's stuck behind your ear?" he asked very solemnly.

"No!" said Tommy Fox. "It's a crow's, and I certainly had a fine breakfast."

Now, Jolly Robin wasn't quite sure whether he ought to laugh or not. And then Tommy winked at him. So Jolly thought there must be a joke somewhere and he began to chirrup as loudly as he could.

"For pity's sake, keep still!" old Mr. Crow snapped.

"But you wanted me to laugh louder," Jolly reminded him.

"Yes," said Mr. Crow, "when there's anything to laugh at."

"But didn't Tommy Fox make a joke?" Jolly Robin asked.

"A very poor one!" old Mr. Crow replied. "A very poor joke, indeed!" He added, "I see you've not had much experience laughing for people. And here's where you make a mistake. You laugh at other people's jokes, which is all wrong. After this you must laugh at my jokes—do you understand?"

Jolly Robin said he understood. And Mr. Crow remarked that he was glad there would be no more trouble.

"And now," the old fellow said, "now we'll go over to the swamp, where Sammy Raccoon lives. We ought to have some fun with him."

So over to the swamp they flew, where they found Sammy Raccoon sunning himself in the top of a tall hemlock.

"How-dy-do!" said Mr. Crow.

But Sammy Raccoon did not answer.

"We're in luck!" Mr. Crow said with a chuckle. "I declare, I believe the old beggar's asleep. Just watch me play a practical joke on him!"

So Mr. Crow lighted on a branch near Sammy Raccoon and began tickling his nose. Pretty soon Sammy Raccoon sneezed. And when that happened, Mr. Crow jumped back quickly. But Sammy didn't awake—at least, he didn't open his eyes. So Mr. Crow tickled his nose again.

Now, old Mr. Crow was so amused that he glanced at Jolly Robin, to see if he was watching. And in that instant when Mr. Crow looked away, Sammy Raccoon leaped at him. He caught Mr. Crow by the tail, too.

The old gentleman set up a great din. He squawked, "Help! Help!" at the top of his voice and flapped his broad wings.

The struggle was over in a moment. By a great effort Mr. Crow broke away, leaving one of his tail feathers with Sammy Raccoon, and flew into a nearby tree.

Then Jolly Robin laughed as if he would never stop. He thought that it must be the proper time to laugh, because Mr. Crow had said he was going to play a joke on Sammy.

Mr. Crow, however, seemed to think differently about the matter. "Do keep quiet!" he cried. "There's nothing to laugh at, so far as I can see."

"But you said you were going to play a joke on Sammy Raccoon, didn't you?" Jolly inquired.

"Yes!" Mr. Crow replied. "But it's no joke to lose a tail feather. And I wouldn't think of laughing at what just happened. Besides," he continued, "your laughter is altogether wrong. What you must try to do is to laugh very sadly. In fact," he added, "I wouldn't mind if you shed a few tears, because I feel quite upset over this unfortunate accident."

Well, Jolly Robin saw at once that it was impossible for him to please Mr. Crow.

"My laughter," he said, "is always merry. I couldn't laugh sadly, no matter how hard I might try. And as for shedding tears, I couldn't weep for you even if you lost all your tail feathers, Mr. Crow."

"Then you may leave at once!" Mr. Crow cried, just as if Farmer Green's pasture belonged to him.

"Yes!" Jolly Robin answered. "I may—and then again, I may not!"

And since he stayed right there and laughed, old Mr. Crow himself flew away.

It was a long while, too, before he could bear to hear people laugh. For he thought they must be laughing at him, because he had lost a tail feather.

And perhaps that was what amused Jolly Robin, though I never thought of that before.





A New Way to Travel

The time had come when Jolly Robin was ready to begin his long journey to the South, for it was growing quite cold. On some days there was no sun at all. And even when the weather was fair, the sun rose late and went to bed early. It was exactly the sort of weather Jolly Robin did not like.

"No doubt you'll be leaving us soon," Jasper Jay remarked to Jolly one day, when the two chanced to meet in Farmer Green's woods, where the beeches grew.

"I expect to start tomorrow," Jolly Robin answered with a short laugh. The mere thought of his warm, light-flooded winter home in the South made him feel glad.

"Well, well!" Jasper Jay exclaimed. "I'm glad I happened to see you, for I know of a new way to travel."

Jolly Robin wanted to know all about it. "If it's a better way than the old, I'll be pleased to try it," he said.

"Oh! It's much better." Jasper told him. "If I hadn't made up my mind to spend the winter in Pleasant Valley, I'd go the new way myself. But the beechnut crop is good this fall. So I shall stay right here to enjoy it."

"Tell me how we're to go, if you please!" Jolly Robin urged him.

"We?" said Jasper. "You don't mean to say you are going with a crowd, do you?"

"Why, yes!" Jolly Robin replied. "All the Robins are leaving tomorrow. And I had intended to go with them"

Jasper Jay shook his head. "Take my advice and don't do any such thing," he said. "You'll find it quieter traveling alone. And though you may not know it, it's the fashionable thing to do."

Jolly Robin laughed when Jasper said that. "But I'm not a fashionable person!" he exclaimed.

"Then you should become one," Jasper told him. "Besides, the new way is easier, as well as more stylish. But if you're afraid to try something new, of course I wouldn't think of urging you."

"I'm not afraid!" Jolly Robin cried. "And if you'll only tell me what I'm to do, I promise you I'll do it!"

"Good!" said Jasper Jay. "Meet me here day after tomorrow and I'll start you on your journey. I can't explain anything now, because I must hurry over to the woods at once, where my cousin, Mr. Crow, is waiting for me." Then he flew away, screaming a loud goodbye as he went.

So Jolly Robin hastened back to the orchard, to find his wife and tell her what he had decided to do.

He had no difficulty at all in finding her. But he had no end of trouble trying to persuade her to travel with him the new way, instead of going along with the crowd in the good, old-fashioned style. In fact, she raised so many objections, saying how lonely it would be and how dangerous it was to travel in a small party and that she didn't want to be fashionable—she raised so many objections that at last Jolly Robin said very well! She might do as she pleased. But as for him, he was going to meet Jasper Jay just as he had promised. And since the new way was easier, he expected to reach their winter home long before she arrived, even if he did start a day later.

But he was disappointed, all the same. And he kept up such a constant laughing and joking all the rest of that day that his wife knew he must be feeling quite out of sorts.

For that was a way Jolly Robin had. The worse he felt, the happier he always acted. And it was not a bad way, either.





Jolly Is Left Behind

All of Jolly Robin's friends and relations were greatly surprised when they saw him bidding his wife and children goodbye, on the day the Robin family started from Pleasant Valley for their winter home in the South.

"What's this?" they cried. "Aren't you coming with us?"

And Jolly Robin laughed and said to them gaily, "Not today! But you'll find me waiting for you when you reach your journey's end."

His wife, however, shook her head. "It's one of his queer notions, his and Jasper Jay's," she explained.

"Tut, tut!" her husband said. And he chucked her under the chin, and winked at his friends.

There was no time to say anything more, for everyone was eager to start. So the travelers called goodbye to Jolly, while he waved a farewell to them.

It was not many minutes before he was the only member of the Robin family left in Pleasant Valley. He felt very lonely, all at once. And he wanted to hurry after the others. But he knew what Jasper Jay would say, if he did. Jasper would be sure to tell people that Jolly Robin was afraid to travel a new way. Of course, Jolly didn't want that to be said about him. So he looked as cheerful as he could; and he whistled the merriest tune he knew. Nobody, except his wife, maybe, would have guessed that he wasn't perfectly happy.

Jolly spent a very lonely night. When he went to the roost where the whole Robin family had been sleeping for several weeks, he found it distressingly silent, after the gay chatter that he had grown accustomed to hearing there. And try as he would, he could not keep just a hint of sadness out of his goodnight song.

But in the morning he felt better. And he welcomed the dawn with a carol that was joyous enough for anybody. For this was the day when Jasper Jay was going to show him the new way to travel. Yes! he, too, would soon be hurrying southward, where the sun was warm.

It was no wonder that he sang, "Cheerily-cheerup, cheerily-cheerup," right merrily.

As soon as he had eaten his breakfast, Jolly went to the place where the beeches grew, to find Jasper Jay. And Jasper was there, just finishing his own breakfast. But he was too busy, he said, to bother with Jolly Robin just then.

"You meet me in the orchard this afternoon," he said, "when the sun's over the mountain, and I'll start you on your journey."

So Jolly Robin had to wait all the long day, while Jasper Jay did a hundred silly things, such as mocking Farmer Green's cat, and teasing a sleepy young owl, and making the woods echo with his hoarse screams. Jasper was late, too, in keeping his appointment in the orchard. Jolly Robin waited for him until almost sunset before Jasper Jay appeared. But Jolly was so glad to see Jasper that he never once thought of being angry with him.

"Come along!" said the blue-coated rascal. "Follow me and you'll soon learn the new way to the South. And if it isn't a good one, I hope I'll never eat another beechnut."

Jolly Robin laughed. He was sure, then, that he had nothing to worry about. For everybody knew that Jasper Jay was especially fond of beechnuts.





Jolly's Mistake

With Jolly Robin following close behind him, Jasper Jay flew directly to the crossroads, almost halfway to the village. Once there, he perched himself upon the sign post at the four corners. And Jolly Robin seated himself upon one of the boards that were nailed to the post.

"Here we are!" said Jasper Jay. "You see how easy it is."

"When will the post begin to move?" Jolly Robin inquired, a bit anxiously. He had waited a whole day to begin his long journey to the South, so it was only natural that he should want to start at once.

"What's that you say?" asked Jasper Jay. And when Jolly repeated his question, Jasper began to scream with laughter. "Well, that's a good one!" he said at last. "So you thought the post was going to

pull itself out of the ground and fly away with you, did you?"

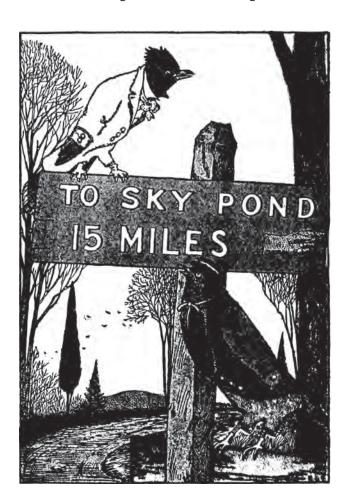
"Why, yes!" Jolly Robin replied. "Aren't these wings?" he asked, looking down at the boards. "They're already spread," he observed.

It was some minutes before Jasper Jay could answer him, for he was laughing again. But finally he managed to speak. "Those aren't wings!" he cried. "It's a signboard, to tell you which road to take. Of course, you can't expect to read a sign when you're sitting on it. Just go over to the fence across the road and you can see the sign that you're on now."

So Jolly Robin fluttered over to the fence. And from there he could see the signboard plainly. This is what it looked like:

TO SKY POND, 15 MILES

"There!" Jasper Jay cried, when Jolly had read the sign aloud. "You see how easy it is. All you need do is to follow this road to which the hand points."



"Then I shall have to fly, after all," Jolly Robin said. He had expected to have a ride. And naturally he was disappointed. Then he read the sign once more. "Sky Pond!" he exclaimed. "I don't want to go to Sky Pond. I want to go to the South!"

"Well, Sky Pond's south of Pleasant Valley," Jasper Jay explained. "It's right on your way to your winter home. And all you have to do when you reach Sky Pond will be to find another sign, which ought to say something like this: 'To the South, one thousand miles.' You see how simple it is," Jasper Jay remarked. "With a signboard to guide you, you can't go wrong."

But it seemed to Jolly that the new way of traveling was far more difficult than the old. He said as much to Jasper Jay, too. "I wish—," he added, "I wish I had started yesterday, with the others."

At that Jasper Jay said, "Nonsense!" And he muttered something about dunces, and mollycoddles, and—yes! 'fraidy-cats!

Perhaps Jasper hadn't intended that Jolly Robin should hear those words, and perhaps he had. Anyhow, he was sorry afterward that he had spoken so loud. For the first thing he knew, Jolly Robin flew straight at him with shrill chirps of rage. And Jasper was so surprised, and frightened, too, that he flew off as fast as he could go, following the road that led to Sky Pond, fifteen miles away, with Jolly Robin after him.

Jolly chased him for a long time, until at last Jasper Jay swerved to one side and turned toward home.

But Jolly Robin followed him no longer. He kept straight on, and on, and on.

And he flew so fast and so far before he stopped that he overtook the party that had started a whole day ahead of him.

So he traveled to his winter home in the old-fashioned way, after all. And though Jolly Robin laughed when he told his friends about Jasper Jay's new style of traveling, there was one thing over which he could not smile, even then. You see, "fraidy-cat" was a name he couldn't abide.





The White Giant

It was a raw March day when Jolly Robin returned to Pleasant Valley one spring. There had just been a heavy fall of snow—big, wet flakes, which Farmer Green called "sugar-snow," though it was no sweeter than any other. Johnnie Green liked that kind of snow because it made the best snowballs. And he had had a fine time playing in the orchard near the farmhouse, not long before Jolly Robin appeared there.

Now, the orchard was the place where Jolly Robin and his wife had had their nest the summer before. So it was natural that he should want to go there at once and look about a bit.

He perched himself on a bare limb, where he sang, "Cheerily-cheerup," a few times, in spite of the snow and the cold, whistling wind. He knew that the weather would grow warmer soon; and he was glad to be in Pleasant Valley once more, though he had to confess to himself that he liked the orchard better when the grass was green and the trees were gay with apple blossoms.

"It's really a beautiful place for a home," he told himself. "I don't wonder that Farmer Green likes to live near the orchard. And now I'll just go over to the house and see if I can't get a peep at him and his wife and his boy Johnnie, and the hired man, too."

So Jolly Robin jumped off the bough and started through the frosty air toward the farmhouse. But all at once he saw a sight that sent him darting into a tree. He hid there for a while and something made him shiver, something besides the cold wind.

Yes! Jolly Robin was the least bit frightened. For he had caught a glimpse of a strange man. It was neither Farmer Green nor his hired man, for this was a giant. He had big, black eyes and a great lump of a nose, which stuck out oddly from his pale moon face. He was dressed all in white, except for a battered, old black hat, which he wore tipped over one eye. In one hand he held a stick. And it seemed to Jolly Robin that the strange man was just about to hurl it at something.

In spite of his uneasiness, Jolly peeped around his tree and watched the stranger. But he did not throw the stick. He stood quite still and seemed to be waiting. And Jolly Robin waited, too, and stared at him.

"Maybe there's a squirrel hiding behind a tree," he said to himself. "Perhaps this man in white is going to throw the stick as soon as the squirrel shows himself."

But no squirrel appeared. And Jolly Robin was just about to start for the farmhouse again when he saw somebody pop out of the woodshed door and come running toward the orchard.

"Here's Johnnie Green!" Jolly exclaimed. He knew Johnnie at once, because neither Farmer Green nor the hired man ever went hopping and skipping about like that.

Pretty soon Jolly saw Johnnie Green stop and make an armful of snowballs. And then he went straight toward the stranger in white. Though Johnnie began to shout, the man in white did not even turn his head. And then Johnnie Green threw a snowball at him.

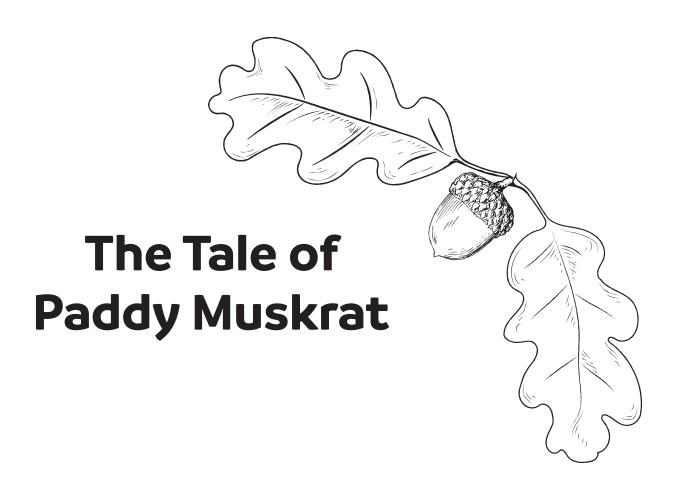
The snowball sailed through the air and struck the stranger's battered hat, knocking it off into the snow. And, of course, Jolly Robin couldn't help laughing. He was more surprised than ever, too, because the moon-faced man did not move even then. Anyone else would have wheeled about and chased Johnnie Green. But this odd gentleman didn't seem to know that his hat had been knocked off.

"That's queer!" said Jolly Robin to himself. "He must be asleep. But I should think he would wake up."

While Jolly was wondering, Johnnie Green threw another snowball. And when it struck the stranger a very peculiar thing happened.

And Jolly Robin did not laugh. He was too frightened to do anything but gasp.





The Tale of Paddy Muskrat

Chapter 1: Paddy's Little Joke	49
Chapter 2: In the New Hat	51
Chapter 3: Pink or Red?	53
Chapter 4: Sweet Flag	55
Chapter 5: Visitors	57
Chapter 6: The Hungry Cousins	59
Chapter 7: Mr. Crow's Fault	61
Chapter 8: The Eating House	63
Chapter 9: Don't Eat the Spoons!	65
Chapter 10: The Tin Dipper	68
Chapter 11: Seeing the Doctor	71
Chapter 12: A Sad Accident	73
Chapter 13: Brass Buttons	76
Chapter 14: The New Policeman	78
Chapter 15: Throwing Stones	80
Chapter 16: Redhead	82
Chapter 17: Fish to Fry	84
Chapter 18: Scaring Peter Mink	87



Paddy's Little Joke

The gristmill where Farmer Green had his wheat ground into flour stood near a millpond.

Now, Farmer Green always supposed that the pond was there so that the miller would have water to turn his mill. But Paddy Muskrat thought that the pond had been put there in order to give him and his neighbors a pleasant place in which to live.

His house was dug out of the bank of the pond. But you might have walked right over it without knowing it was there. Paddy reached it through a long tunnel, the door of which was hidden by the water. And there he lived with his wife. They liked their home. And they were quite happy and never had a quarrel.

Sometimes Paddy Muskrat stayed away from home more than Mrs. Paddy liked. You see, he was very fond of swimming. In fact, that was why he was called Paddy, because he had begun to paddle in the water when he was so young that he was hardly more than a little round ball.

To be sure, Mrs. Paddy was a fine swimmer herself. But she used to say that her husband ought to have been a fish for he never seemed to get enough swimming to satisfy him. He had a way, in summer, of spending a good deal of time right where a big willow flung its shadow upon the water. And he might have been seen there often, swimming around and around in a circle and trying to catch his tail.

Mrs. Paddy used to tell him that he was too old for such foolishness. But it was a game he liked. And he never grew tired of it.

Even in winter, when the water was freezing cold, Paddy went for a swim almost every day. In one way he enjoyed his winter more than his summer swims for he was quite safe from enemies when the ice covered the pond. In fact, unless Peter Mink or one of his relatives came prowling about beneath the ice, there was nothing to trouble Paddy and his wife during that season.

In summer, Paddy Muskrat had many enemies. Johnnie Green was by no means the least of these. He was continually setting traps to catch Paddy, who was the biggest of all the Muskrat family that lived in Pleasant Valley.

Now, Johnnie Green had succeeded in catching a good many of Paddy's distant cousins. If you could have seen the side of Farmer Green's woodshed, half covered by the skins Johnnie Green had nailed there, you would understand why Paddy was usually pretty careful where he stepped.

And when you hear that Mr. Crow told him one day that Johnnie had saved a place on the side of the woodshed especially for him, you can see why Paddy Muskrat was in no hurry to occupy it.

Luckily for him, he never came to such a sad end. Though when he vexed Mrs. Paddy, she said, sometimes, that if he should get caught, perhaps it would teach him not to stay away from home so much. And then Paddy Muskrat always told her that being nailed to Farmer Green's woodshed ought to teach him to stay away all the time.

Of course, that was just a little joke of his. But Mrs. Paddy never cared for it.



Chapter

In the New Hat

One day Paddy Muskrat came home looking quite distressed. His wife noticed that he seemed to be in trouble.

"What has happened, my dear?" she asked him. "You are looking very sad. And you've lost your hat. I hope you haven't been in a fight," she said, as she peered at Paddy anxiously.

"No!" said Paddy. "There's been no fight. As I was swimming near the milldam, my hat came off and the water swept it right over the dam and down the stream."

"There!" Mrs. Paddy cried. "I knew that would happen! That's the fourth hat you've lost this summer. You remember I wanted to sew an elastic band on your hat, to snap under your chin."

"None of my friends keep their hats on in that way," said Paddy Muskrat. "But I shall have to do something. I can't keep losing hats like this. I'm going over to buy a new hat from Jimmy Rabbit and I'll ask him what I'd better do. "

"Jimmy Rabbit!" Mrs. Paddy exclaimed. "I didn't know he was a hatter."

"Mr. Crow tells me he has just opened a fine hat store. He has all the latest styles of hats, so Mr. Crow says."

"Do go over there at once, then!" Mrs. Paddy urged her husband. "I hope you'll find a becoming hat," she said. "A hat with a pink ribbon on it would look good on you. I'm sorry I'm so busy for I'd like to go and help you choose one."

But Paddy Muskrat was not sorry. He shuddered at the mere idea of wearing a hat with a pink ribbon.

"I'll see what Jimmy Rabbit has," he promised. And then he started for the hat store.

It was just as Mr. Crow had said. Jimmy Rabbit had a fine array of hats. And though he had hats with ribbons of many different colors, to Paddy Muskrat's great relief he hadn't a single one with a pink ribbon on it.

Paddy tried on a hat that took his fancy.

"Have you a looking-glass?" he asked Jimmy Rabbit.

"Certainly!" Jimmy replied. "That pool over there in the brook is the best mirror you ever saw."

So Paddy went and looked into the pool. "This hat makes my ears look too big," he objected.

"Big ears are quite the fashion this season," Jimmy Rabbit told him. "As you see. I'm wearing mine quite large. The trouble with this hat is that it makes your ears look not too big, but too little. The way to make your ears look as big as possible is to wear the smallest hat you can keep on your head. Here is one that will just suit you." And he clapped upon Paddy Muskrat's head a little, flat straw hat with a narrow brim. "Now go and look at yourself in my mirror!" Jimmy urged. "You'll like this one, I know."

Once more Paddy looked into the deep pool. At first he thought the hat looked very strange. But the longer he gazed at his reflection, the better he liked it.

"There's just one thing about this hat that I don't care for," he told Jimmy Rabbit. "It has a green ribbon and I want a red one."

Jimmy Rabbit promptly found a hat exactly like the one on Paddy's head, except that its ribbon was red.

"Now," Jimmy said, "you ought to feel pretty happy. For you won't see a more stylish hat anywhere in Pleasant Valley."

But Paddy Muskrat didn't seem happy at all.

"I forgot one thing," he remarked. "I don't see how I can keep this hat on my head when I'm in the water. It's so small, it will be sure to fall off. I don't believe I'd better take it, after all."

For a few moments Jimmy Rabbit looked disappointed. And then he said, "Let me think! Give me six seconds in which to think and I'll tell you of some way to fix the hat so it won't trouble you."

Paddy Muskrat agreed to that. And he sat down, with the hat on his head, and waited.





The Tale of Solomon Owl

Chapter 1: Scaring Johnnie Green	. 91
Chapter 2: A Newcomer	. 93
Chapter 3: Solomon Likes Frogs	. 95
Chapter 4: An Odd Bargain	. 97
Chapter 5: The Cold Weather Coat	. 99
Chapter 6: Solomon Needs a Change	. 102
Chapter 7: The Blazing Eyes	. 104
Chapter 8: Watching the Chickens	.106
Chapter 9: Halloween	. 108
Chapter 10: A Troublesome Wishbone	. 110
Chapter 11: Cured at Last	. 112
Chapter 12: Benjamin Bat	. 114
Chapter 13: The Lucky Guest	. 116
Chapter 14: Hanging by the Heels	. 118
Chapter 15: Disputes Settled	. 120
Chapter 16: Nine Fights	. 122
Chapter 17: Cousin Simon Screecher	. 124
Chapter 18: A Cousinly Quarrel	. 126
Chapter 19: The Sleet Storm	. 128
Chapter 20: A Pair of Redheads	. 130
Chapter 21: At Home in the Haystack	. 132
Chapter 22: It Was Solomon's Fault	. 134



Scaring Johnnie Green

When Johnnie Green was younger, it always scared him to hear Solomon Owl's deep-toned voice calling in the woods after dark.

"Whoo-whoo, whoo-whoo, to-whoo-ah!" That weird cry was enough to send Johnnie Green hurrying into the farmhouse, though sometimes he paused in the doorway to listen, especially if Solomon Owl happened to be laughing. His "hawhaw-hoo-hoo," booming across the meadow on a crisp fall evening, when the big yellow moon hung over the fields of cornshocks and pumpkins, sounded almost as though Solomon were laughing at the little boy he had frightened. There was certainly a mocking, jeering note in his laughter.

Of course, as he grew older, Johnnie Green no longer shivered on hearing Solomon's rolling call. When Solomon laughed, Johnnie Green would laugh, too. But Solomon Owl never knew that, for often he was half a mile from the farm buildings.

A "hoot owl," Johnnie Green termed him. And anyone who heard Solomon hooting in the evening, or just before sunrise, would have agreed that it was a good name for him. He was really a barred owl, for he had bars of white across his feathers.

If you had happened to catch Solomon Owl resting among the thick hemlocks near the foot of Blue Mountain, where he lived, you would have thought that he looked strangely like a human being. He had no "horns," or ear tufts, such as some of the other owls wore; and his great pale face, with its black eyes, made him seem very wise and solemn.

In spite of the mild, questioning look upon his face whenever anyone surprised him in the daytime, Solomon Owl was the noisiest of all the different families of owls in Pleasant Valley. There were also the barn owls, the long-eared owls, the short-eared owls, the saw-whet owls, the screech owls, and others. There's no use naming them all. There wasn't one of them that could equal Solomon Owl's laughing and hooting and shrieking and wailing at night.

During the day, however, Solomon Owl seldom had anything to say, or if he had, he was quiet about it. One reason for his silence then was that he generally slept when the sun was shining. And when most people were sleeping, Solomon Owl was as wide awake as he could be.

He was a night prowler, if ever there was one.

He could see a mouse on the darkest night, even if it stirred ever so slightly. That was unfortunate for the mice. But luckily for them, Solomon Owl couldn't be in more than one place at a time. Otherwise, there wouldn't have been a mouse left in Pleasant Valley, if he could have had his way.

And though he didn't help the mice, he helped Farmer Green by catching them. If he did take a fat pullet once in a while, it is certain that he more than paid for it.

So, on the whole, Farmer Green did not object to Solomon Owl's living in the wood lot. And for a long time Solomon raised no objection to Farmer Green's living near Swift River.

But later Solomon Owl claimed that it would be a good thing for the forest folk if they could get rid of the whole Green family, and the hired man, too.





A Newcomer

Upon his arrival as a stranger in Pleasant Valley, Solomon Owl looked about carefully for a place to live. What he wanted especially was a good, dark hole, for he thought that sunshine was very dismal.

Though he was willing to stir himself enough to suit anybody, when it came to hunting, Solomon Owl did not like to work. He was no busy nest builder, like Rusty Wren. In his search for a house he looked several times at the home of old Mr. Crow.

If it had suited him better, Solomon would not have hesitated to take it for his own. But in the end, he decided that it was altogether too light to please him.

That was lucky for old Mr. Crow. And the black rascal knew it, too. He had noticed that Solomon Owl was hanging about the neighborhood. And several times he caught Solomon examining his nest.

But Mr. Crow did not have to worry long. For as it happened, Solomon Owl at last found exactly what he wanted. In an old hollow hemlock, he came across a cozy, dark cavity. As soon as he saw it, he knew that it was the very thing! So he moved in at once. And except for the time that he spent in the meadow, which was considerably later, he lived there for a good many years.

Once Sammy Raccoon thought that he would drive Solomon out of his snug house and live in it himself. But he soon changed his mind after one attempt to oust Solomon.

Solomon Owl, so Sammy discovered, had sharp, strong claws and a sharp, strong beak as well, which curled over his face in a cruel hook.

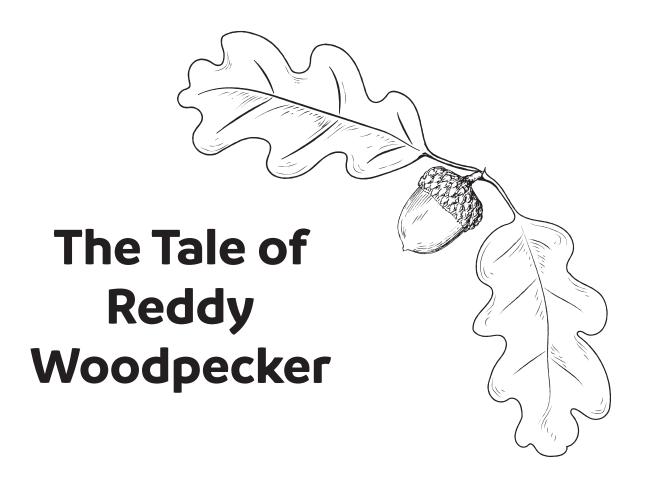
It was really a good thing for Solomon Owl, the fight he had with Sammy Raccoon. For afterward his neighbors seldom troubled him, except when Jasper Jay brought a crowd of his noisy friends to tease Solomon, or Reddy Woodpecker annoyed him by rapping on his door when he was asleep.

But those rowdies always took good care to skip out of Solomon's reach. And when Jasper Jay met Solomon alone in the woods at dawn or dusk he was most polite to the solemn old chap. Then it was, "Howdy do, Mr. Owl!" and, "I hope you're well today!" And when Solomon Owl turned his great, round, black eyes on Jasper, that bold fellow always felt quite uneasy; and he was glad when Solomon Owl looked away.

If Solomon Owl chanced to hoot on those occasions, Jasper Jay would jump almost out of his bright blue coat. Then Solomon's deep laughter would echo mockingly through the woods.

You see, though not nearly so wise as he appeared, Solomon Owl knew well enough how to frighten some people.





The Tale of Reddy Woodpecker

Chapter 1: Mrs. Robin's News	139
Chapter 2: Getting Acquainted	141
Chapter 3: Morning Tattoos	143
Chapter 4: The High Hole	145
Chapter 5: Too Much Cousin	147
Chapter 6: Mr. Flicker's Plans	149
Chapter 7: The Two Neighbors	151
Chapter 8: An Early Call	153
Chapter 9: Mrs. Robin Worries	155
Chapter 10: Obeying Orders	157
Chapter 11: A Very Short Fight	159
Chapter 12: Jolly Robin's Helper	161
Chapter 13: The Carpenter	163
Chapter 14: Mr. Crow's Questions	165
Chapter 15: The Redcaps	167
Chapter 16: A Sly Trick	169
Chapter 17: A Hunting Party	171
Chapter 18: A Big Appetite	173
Chapter 19: Who Was Greedy?	175
Chapter 20: Catching Flies	177
Chapter 21: The Odd Mr. Frog	179
Chapter 22: Dodging Danger	181
Chapter 23: Beechnuts	183
Chapter 24: The Winter's Store	185



Mrs. Robin's News

If you had been in Farmer Green's dooryard on a certain day in May, you would have heard an unusual twittering and chirping and squawking.

Now, there was a reason for all this chatter. Jolly Robin's wife had seen a handsome stranger in the orchard. And she had hurried away to spread the news among her friends.

"He's a dashing person, very elegantly dressed," Mrs. Robin told everybody.

That remark did not seem to please the good lady's husband. For Jolly Robin turned up his nose (or his bill) slightly, and he said to his wife, "The question is, what are his manners like?"

Mrs. Robin admitted that the stranger's manners were not all what one might wish. "He was somewhat noisy," she explained. "And I fear he may be quarrelsome. But his clothes certainly were beautiful."

Jasper Jay, who was something of a dandy, wanted to know exactly what the stranger wore. He said he doubted that the newcomer was as fashionable as Mrs. Robin supposed.

"I can't tell you much about his suit," Mrs. Robin went on, "except that it was new and stylish. What I noticed especially was his cap. It was a big one and it was a brilliant red."

Jasper Jay sniffed when he heard that. "They're not wearing red caps this season," he declared.

He flew off then, to find his cousin, Mr. Crow, and tell him the news. For he hoped that Mr. Crow would give the stranger a disagreeable greeting. Jasper Jay did not like other birds to be more gaily dressed than he

While all the feathered folk in the neighborhood were wondering who the stranger could be, old Mr. Crow came winging over from the edge of the woods.

"Where is he?" he squalled. "Let me have one look at this new arrival! I think I know who he is."

A little later Mr. Crow had his look, over in the orchard. Then he came back and landed in the tall grass behind the farmhouse.

"He's a Red-headed Woodpecker," Mr. Crow announced with a wise tilt of his own head. "There hasn't been one of his kind in Pleasant Valley for years and years. It's a pity," he added, "that this one has stopped here."

The old gentleman's words threw little Mrs. Chippy into a flutter. "Is he a dangerous person?" she quavered.

"I believe so," said Mr. Crow darkly.

"Does he eat eggs?" Mrs. Chippy faltered. "And nestlings?"

For a moment or two old Mr. Crow couldn't make up his mind whether he ought to get angry or not. Eating eggs and young birds was a subject he liked to avoid. He was aware that his neighbors knew he was a rascal. But he was a quick-witted old fellow. Suddenly he saw how the presence of this stranger might help him.

"Yes!" he told Mrs. Chippy. "This Woodpecker family all eat eggs and nestlings. And if you people miss any of your treasures, later, you'll know who took them."

At that, little Mr. Chippy nodded his chestnut-crowned head. "If it isn't you," he remarked to Mr. Crow, "then it will be the stranger."

"Not at all! Not at all!" the old gentleman squawked. "You'll be safe in thinking the newcomer guilty." Then he turned his back on Mr. Chippy, as if that small, shrinking chap weren't worth noticing. And favoring Mrs. Chippy with what he thought was a pleasant smile, Mr. Crow said to her, "You mustn't let this Red-head know where your nest is. I've no doubt you have eggs in it already."

"Yes, I have," she twittered proudly.

"I certainly hope Red-head won't steal them," said Mr. Crow. "It would be a shame if you lost your beautiful eggs. Where is your nest, Mrs. Chippy?"

"Don't tell him!" peeped Mr. Chippy to his wife. "He wants to eat our eggs himself."

As for Mr. Crow, he gave a hoarse cry of rage before he flapped himself away.





Getting Acquainted

"I don't believe," said Mrs. Jolly Robin after old Mr. Crow had flown off in a rage, "I don't believe this Mr. Woodpecker can be such a bad person as Mr. Crow thinks. He certainly wears very stylish clothes and a very handsome red cap."

"Clothes," said little Mr. Chippy severely, "don't tell whether their wearer has a taste for eggs. Now, I wear a red cap. To be sure, it isn't as bright, perhaps, nor as big as Mr. Woodpecker's. But it's a red cap, all the same. And everybody knows that I don't eat eggs. Everybody knows I'm no nest robber."

"You don't look like one!" cried a strange voice, which made everybody jump.

It was the newcomer, Mr. Woodpecker, himself! Unnoticed, he had flown up. And now he perched on a limb nearby. "You don't look any more like a nest robber than I do," he told Mr. Chippy.

The whole company stared at him; and then stared at little Mr. Chippy. There was a vast difference between them. Mr. Chippy was a tiny, meek person, while Mr. Woodpecker was as bold as brass. Mr. Chippy was modestly dressed, and his cap, though it was reddish, was of a dull hue. But the newcomer wore a flashy suit of dark steel blue and white and his cap was both very big and very red.

Mr. Chippy was a shy body who said little, and when he did speak it was usually only to utter a faint, "Chip, chip, chip, chip." But Mr. Woodpecker was very talkative. When he spoke, you didn't have to strain your ears to hear what he said.

Mr. Woodpecker gave a quick glance all about and cried, "Howdy do!"

"Good morning, Mr. Woodpecker!" the birds greeted him.

"Don't call me 'Mister'!" he said. "My name is Reddy, Reddy Woodpecker." Then he turned to little, shrinking Mr. Chippy and his wife. "I can see that you're worried about your eggs," he remarked. "I suppose your nest is hidden not far away."

Mr. and Mrs. Chippy looked most uncomfortable. They didn't quite dare speak to such a grand person as Reddy.

"Where's your nest?" Reddy asked them bluntly.

"Chip, chip, chip, chip!" said Mr. Chippy.

"Chip, chip, chip!" said his wife.

"What sort of answer is that to a civil question?" Reddy Woodpecker blustered. "Here I've just

made your acquaintance. And I've asked you to call me by my first name. And you won't even tell me where you live."

Mr. and Mrs. Chippy didn't know what to say. It was lucky for them that Mr. Catbird came to their rescue.

"Don't bully these good people!" Mr. Catbird cried, as he settled himself right in front of Reddy Woodpecker. "If you had heard what old Mr. Crow said about you, just before you arrived, you'd understand why Mr. and Mrs. Chippy don't care to tell you where their nest is."

Reddy glared at Mr. Catbird. "Old Mr. Crow? Who's he?" Reddy demanded. "I haven't made his acquaintance. I'm sure he can't know anything about me."

"Ah! Perhaps not!" Mr. Catbird answered. "But he knows what sort of family yours is. He has met others like you."

Reddy sniffed. "I never saw a Crow that wasn't a rascally blackguard," he snapped. "There never was a Crow that wasn't a nest robber."

"Chip, chip, chip, chip!" Mr. Chippy interrupted.

"What's he saying?" Reddy Woodpecker asked Mr. Catbird.

"He says he agrees with you."

"Then he has more sense than I thought," Reddy observed. "And if Mr. Crow spoke ill of me, I hope Mr. Chippy has enough sense not to believe him."

"Chip, chip, chip, chip!"

"What's he saying now?" Reddy Woodpecker demanded of Mr. Catbird.

"He says he agrees with Mr. Crow," Mr. Catbird explained very pleasantly.

"Then he hasn't any sense at all!" cried Reddy.

The whole company couldn't help giggling when he said that. And Reddy Woodpecker promptly lost his temper.

"I've planned to spend the summer here," he said. "It's too late now to move on. But I can understand at last why none of my family has visited this neighborhood for many years. It's a pleasant enough place. But the neighbors aren't my sort at all."

"Chip, chip, chip!" piped Mr. Chippy.

"He says he agrees with you," Mr. Catbird told Reddy Woodpecker. And then he added, "Meow!" And he gave himself a jerk and spread his tail, all of which told Reddy Woodpecker plainly that Mr. Catbird had a very poor opinion of him.





The Tale of Chirpy Cricket

Chapter 1: The Fiddler	189
Chapter 2: The Bumblebee Family	192
Chapter 3: Too Much Music	194
Chapter 4: A Light in the Dark	196
Chapter 5: A Plan Goes Wrong	198
Chapter 6: Johnnie Green's Guest	200
Chapter 7: Pleasing Johnnie Green	202
Chapter 8: An Interrupted Nap	204
Chapter 9: Caught!	206
Chapter 10: An Odd, New Cousin	208
Chapter 11: An Underground Chat	210
Chapter 12: A Question of Feet	212
Chapter 13: Chirpy Is Careful	214
Chapter 14: Tommy Tree Cricket	216
Chapter 15: A Long Wait	218
Chapter 16: Sitting on a Lily Pad	220
Chapter 17: Mr. Cricket Frog's Trick	222
Chapter 18: It Wasn't Thunder	224
Chapter 19: Bound to Be Different	226
Chapter 20: Mr. Nighthawk Explains	228
Chapter 21: Harmless Mr. Meadow Mouse	230
Chapter 22: A Wail in the Dark	232
Chapter 23: Frightening Simon Screecher	234



The Fiddler

If Chirpy Cricket had been making music earlier in the summer, perhaps he wouldn't have given so much time to fiddling in Farmer Green's farmyard. Everybody admitted that Chirpy was the most musical insect in the whole neighborhood. And it seemed as if he tried his hardest to crowd as much music as possible into a few weeks, though he had been silent enough during all the spring.

He had dug himself a hole in the ground, under some straw that was scattered near the barn, and every night, from midsummer on, he came out and made merry.

But in the daytime he was usually quiet as a mouse, sitting inside his hole and doing nothing at all except to wait patiently until it should be dark again, so that he might crawl forth from his hiding place and take up his music where he had left it unfinished the night before. Somehow he always knew exactly where to begin. Although he carried no sheets of music with him, he never had to stop and wonder what note to begin on, for the reason that he always fiddled on the same one.

When rude people asked Chirpy Cricket, as they did now and then, why he didn't change his tune, he always replied that a person couldn't change anything without taking time. And since he expected to make only a short stay in Pleasant Valley he didn't want to fritter away any precious moments.

Chirpy Cricket's neighbors soon noticed that he carried his fiddle with him everywhere he went. And the curious ones asked him a question.

"Why," they inquired, "why are you forever taking your fiddle with you?"

And Chirpy Cricket reminded them that the summer would be gone almost before anybody knew it. He said that when he wanted to play a tune he didn't intend to waste any valuable time hunting for his fiddle.

Now, all that was true enough. But it was just as true that he couldn't have left his fiddle at home anyhow. Chirpy made his music with his two wings. He rubbed a filelike ridge of one on a rough part of the other. So his fiddle (if you could call it by that name) just naturally had to go wherever he did.

"Cr-r-r-i-r! cr-r-r-i!" When that shrill sound, all on one note, rang out in the night, everybody who heard it knew that Chirpy Cricket was sawing out his odd music. And the warmer the night, the faster he played. He liked warm weather. Somehow it seemed to make him feel especially lively.

People who wanted to be disagreeable were always remarking in Chirpy Cricket's hearing that they hoped there would be an early frost. They thought, of course, that he would know they were tired of his music and that they wished he would keep still. But such speeches only made him fiddle faster.

"An early frost!" he would exclaim. "I must hurry if I'm to finish my summer's fiddling."

Now, Chirpy had dozens and dozens of relations living in holes of their own, in the farmyard or the fields. And the gentlemen were all musical. Like him, they were fiddlers. Somehow fiddling ran in their family. So, on warm nights, during the last half of the summer, there was sure to be a Crickets' concert.

Sometimes it seemed to Johnnie Green, who lived in the farmhouse, as if Chirpy Cricket and his relations were trying to drown out the songs of the musical Frog family, over in the swamp.

Chirpy Cricket didn't spend all his time merely sitting quietly in his hole in the daytime and fiddling every night, because, of course, he had to eat. And each night he was in the habit of creeping out of his hole and gathering spears of grass in Farmer Green's yard, which he carried home with him. He called that "doing his marketing."

And it was lucky for him that he liked grass, because there was so much of it to be had. All he had to do was to step outside his door; and there it was, all around him! It made housekeeping an easy matter and left him plenty of time, every night, to fiddle and frolic.

Somehow Chirpy could never go from one place to another in a slow, sober walk. He always moved by leaps, as if he felt too happy to plod along like some other creatures—Daddy Longlegs, for instance. Chirpy himself often remarked that he hadn't time to move slowly. And almost before he had finished speaking, as likely as not he would jump into the air and land some distance away. It was all done so quickly that a person could scarcely see how it happened. But Chirpy Cricket said it was as easy as anything. And having leaped like that, often he would begin to shuffle his wings together the moment he landed on the ground, thereby making his shrill music.

Many of his neighbors declared that he believed a short life and a merry one was the best kind. And when they thought of Timothy Turtle, who was so old that nobody could even guess his age, and was so disagreeable and snappish that everyone kept out of his way, the neighbors decided that possibly Chirpy Cricket's way was the better of the two. Anyhow, there was no doubt that Timothy Turtle believed in a long life and a grumpy one.

All Chirpy's relatives were of the same mind as he. They acted as if they would rather make the nights ring with their music than do anything else. And Johnnie Green said one evening, when he heard Solomon Owl hooting over in the hemlock woods, that it was lucky there weren't as many owls as there were crickets in the valley. If there were hundreds, or maybe thousands, of owls, and they all hooted at the same time, there'd be no sleeping for anybody. At least that was Johnnie Green's opinion. And it does seem a reasonable one.

Chirpy Cricket's nearest relations all looked exactly like him. Everybody said that the Crickets bore a strong family resemblance to one another. But there were others, more distant cousins, who were quite unlike Chirpy. There were the Mole Crickets, who stayed in the ground and never, never came to

the surface, and there were the Tree Crickets, who lived in the trees and fiddled "Re-teat! Re-teat! Re-teat!" until you might have thought they would get tired of their ditty. But they never did.

They seemed to like their music as much as Chirpy Cricket liked his "Cr-r-r-i! cr-rr-i! cr-rr-i!"



Chapter

The Bumblebee Family

The farmyard was not the first place that Chirpy Cricket chose for his home. Before he dug himself a hole under the straw near the barn, he had settled in the pasture. Although the cows seemed to think that the grass in the pasture belonged to them alone, Chirpy decided that there ought to be enough for him, too, if he didn't eat too much.

He had been living in the pasture some time before he discovered that a very musical family had come to live next door to him. They were known as the Bumblebees, and there were dozens of them huddled into a hole, long since deserted by some Woodchucks that had moved to other quarters.

Although they were said to be great workers—most of them, anyway!—the Bumblebee family found plenty of time to make music. They were very fond of humming. And in the beginning Chirpy Cricket thought their humming a pleasant sound to hear, as he sat in his dark hole during the daytime.

"They're having a party in there," he said, the first time he noticed the droning music. "No doubt," he added, "no doubt they're enjoying a dance!" The thought made him feel so jolly that if it had only been dark out of doors he would have left his home and leaped about in the pasture.

All that day, between naps, Chirpy would hear the humming. "It's certainly a long party!" he exclaimed, when he awoke late in the afternoon and heard the Bumblebee family still making music. But about sunset their humming stopped. And Chirpy Cricket couldn't help feeling a bit disappointed, because he had hoped to enjoy dancing to the Bumblebees' music when he left his home that evening.

A little later he told his favorite cousin about the party that had lasted all day. And Chirpy said that he supposed the Bumblebees had only one party a year, because he understood that most of them were great workers, and he didn't believe they would care very often to spend a whole day humming.

The favorite cousin gave Chirpy a strange look in the moonlight. And then he began to fiddle, making no remark whatsoever. He thought there was no use wasting words on a fine, warm night, just the sort of night for a lively "Cr-r-r-i! cr-r-r-i! cr-rr-i!"

Chirpy Cricket lost no time in getting his own fiddle to working. And each of the Crickets really believed he was himself making most of the music that was heard in the pasture. Once in a while Chirpy Cricket and his cousin stopped to eat a little grass, or paused to carry a few spears into their holes, because they liked to have something to nibble on in the daytime. But they always returned to

their fiddling again, and played nearly nonstop until almost morning. At last Chirpy Cricket announced that he would make no more music that night.

"I'll go home now," he said. "I expect to have a good day's rest, and I'll meet you at this same spot tomorrow night for a little fiddling."

"I'll be here," his favorite cousin promised.





The Tale of Old Dog Spot

Chapter 1: Almost Twins	239
Chapter 2: Teasing the Cat	241
Chapter 3: A Wild Dog	243
Chapter 4: The Woodpile	245
Chapter 5: A Deep Secret	247
Chapter 6: Buried Treasure	249
Chapter 7: Swimming	251
Chapter 8: What Red Did	253
Chapter 9: A Bundle of Clothes	255
Chapter 10: Dropping Hints	257
Chapter 11: Mrs. Green's Mistake	259
Chapter 12: Righting a Wrong	261
Chapter 13: Missing His Master	263
Chapter 14: A Basketful of Fun	265
Chapter 15: Mrs. Woodchuck Runs	267
Chapter 16: The Danger Signal	269
Chapter 17: A Crowded House	271
Chapter 18: Off for the Circus	273
Chapter 19: Spot Goes to Town	275
Chapter 20: The Circus Parade	277
Chapter 21: The Circus Grounds	279
Chapter 22: Spot Sees the Show	281
Chapter 23: Home Again	283



Almost Twins

Nobody ever spoke of Old Spot's master as "old Johnnie Green." Yet the two, boy and dog, were almost exactly the same age. Somehow Spot grew up faster than Johnnie. He had stopped being a puppy by the time his young master learned to walk. And when Johnnie was big enough to play around the farm buildings, his parents felt sure that he was safe so long as "Old Spot," as they called the dog, was with him.

Spot thought himself years older than the small boy; or at least he always acted so. If a goose hissed at little, toddling Johnnie Green, Old Spot would drive the goose away, barking in a loud voice, "Don't you frighten this child!" If Johnnie went into the stable and wandered within reach of the horses' heels, Spot would take hold of his clothes and draw him gently back out of danger. And if Johnnie strayed to the duck pond, the old dog wouldn't leave him even to chase the cat, but stayed right there by the pond, ready to pull his young charge out of the water in case he happened to fall in.

Spot seemed to enjoy his task of taking care of Johnnie Green. It wasn't all work. A great deal of pleasure went with his duties, for Johnnie Green never wanted to do anything but play. And Spot wasn't so grown up that he couldn't enjoy a lively romp. For that matter, he never did get over his liking for boisterous fun.

Still, there were some kinds of sport that he didn't care for. He wasn't fond of having such things as tin cans tied to his tail. He disliked being harnessed to a toy wagon. He hated to have his ears pulled. Yet there was only one offense that ever made him growl. When Johnnie Green took a bone away from him, Spot couldn't help warning him, with a deep, rumbling grumbling, that he was going too far, even between friends. But he never snapped at Johnnie. That growling was only Spot's way of teaching Johnnie Green manners.

Fond as he was of his young master, Spot did not care to spend all his time playing childish games. There were grown-up things that he liked to do, things in which a toddler like Johnnie Green couldn't take part. Around the farmhouse there was always the cat to be teased and squirrels to be chased into trees. In the pasture there were woodchucks to be hunted; and even if he couldn't catch them, it was fun to see those fat fellows tumble into their holes.

Then there were the cows. Spot loved to help Farmer Green drive them home late in the afternoon. He acted very important when he went for the cows, always pretending that it was hard work, though he really thought it great sport.

Sometimes when Johnnie Green wanted to play with Spot, the old dog couldn't be found anywhere. He might be over the hill, visiting a neighbor's dog. He might be in the woods, looking for birds. He might even have followed a wagon to the village.

As Johnnie Green grew older, he roamed through the woods with Spot. They had many adventures and games, and even went swimming.

Sometimes Spot and Johnnie Green teased the Muley Cow in the pasture. The old dog and the boy enjoyed this thoroughly. She did not share their delight.

"For pity's sake, keep that boy out of the pasture!" she bellowed. "It frightens me to have him come near me when he's in a teasing mood." She gave a sort of snort and tossed her head. "It's lucky for Johnnie Green," she sniffed, "that I'm not a cow with a grudge, or he might not have any butter on his bread."





Teasing the Cat

When Miss Kitty Cat came to the farmhouse to live, she soon showed Old Dog Spot that she could fight like a vixen. The first time he cornered her she put some scratches on his nose that he never forgot. And after that he always took great pains to keep out of reach of Miss Kitty's claws.

So long as Miss Kitty Cat ran away from him, Spot would follow her, yelping madly. But when she stopped, he stopped too, digging his own claws into the dirt in order to leave a safe distance between Miss Kitty and his nose.

He quickly discovered that there were ways in which he could tease Miss Kitty Cat that annoyed her greatly, while keeping his nose out of harm's way. Growling always made her tail grow big. Barking made her spit at him. But there was something else that angered her still more. When Spot stood stock-still one day, with his tail stuck straight out behind him, and pointed at her with his nose, he made her almost frantic.

"What are you pointing at with that long nose of yours?" Miss Kitty Cat snarled.



Spot didn't say a word. He didn't move any more than the iron dog did, that stood in a yard on the outskirts of the village and never so much as wagged his tail from one year's end to another.

Somehow Spot's strange behavior gave Miss Kitty Cat an odd, creepy feeling along her back. Her fur rose on end. She glared at Spot and spat at him in a most unladylike fashion.

Spot found it very hard to stand still and never let out a single yelp. Once he almost whined. But he managed to stifle the sound. "If she swells up much more she's likely to burst," he thought.

"Go away!" Miss Kitty scolded. "Don't you know better than to stare at a lady?"

Never an answer did Old Spot make. It was a little more than Miss Kitty Cat could endure. With a yowl that had in it something of anger and something of fear as well, she jumped off the doorstep where she had been sitting and whisked around the corner of the house.

With Miss Kitty's first leap, Spot came suddenly to life. He barked joyfully and followed her. Miss Kitty Cat ran up a tree in the yard and stayed there until Spot went off chuckling.

"I'm glad I played that trick on her," he said to himself. "It seems to bother her more than anything else I've ever tried."

Thereafter, Spot often pointed at Miss Kitty when he met her, either inside the house or about the yard. And she never failed to fly into a passion. "Such manners I never saw!" she spluttered when she talked one day with a cat from the nearest farmhouse.

"I'd soon cure the old dog of that unpleasant trick if he tried it on me," her neighbor remarked.

"What would you do?" Miss Kitty Cat wanted to know.

"I'd chase him."

"He can run faster than I can," said Miss Kitty.

"When he's pointing at you, jump at him before he can turn around. If you drag your claws across his nose just once he'll be careful after that to look the other way when he sees you."

"Your plan sounds as if it might be worth trying," said Miss Kitty thoughtfully.

