

CHAPTER XI
Peter Rabbit Gets a Fright

PETER Rabbit sat in his favorite place in the middle of the dear Old Briar-patch, trying to decide which way he would go on his travels that night. The night before he had had a narrow escape from old Granny Fox over in the Green Forest. There was nothing to eat around the Smiling Pool and no one to talk to there any more, and you know that Peter must either eat or ask questions in order to be perfectly happy. No, the Smiling Pool was too dull a place to interest Peter on such a beautiful moonlight night, and Peter had no mind to try his legs against those of old Granny Fox again in the Green Forest.

Early that morning, just after Peter had settled down for his morning nap, Tommy Tit the Chickadee had dropped into the dear Old Briar-patch just to be neighborly. Peter was just dozing off when he heard the cheeriest little voice in the world. It was saying:

“Dee-dee-chickadee!
I see you! Can you see me?”

Peter began to smile even before he could get his eyes open and look up. There, right over his head, was Tommy Tit hanging head down from a nodding old bramble. In a twinkling he was down on the snow right in front of Peter, then up in the brambles again, right side up, upside down, here, there, everywhere, never still a minute, and all the time chattering away in the cheeriest little voice in the world.

“Dee-dee-chickadee!
I’m as happy as can be!
Find it much the better way
To be happy all the day.
Dee-dee-chickadee!
Everybody’s good to me!”

“Hello, Tommy!” said Peter Rabbit. “Where’d you come from?”

“From Farmer Brown’s new orchard up on the hill. It’s a fine orchard, Peter Rabbit, a fine orchard. I go there every morning for my breakfast. If the winter lasts long enough, I’ll have all the trees cleaned up for Farmer Brown.”

Peter looked puzzled. “What do you mean?” he

asked.

“Just what I say,” replied Tommy Tit, almost turning a somersault in the air. “There’s a million eggs of insects on those young peach trees, but I’m clearing them all off as fast as I can. They’re mighty fine eating, Peter Rabbit, mighty fine eating!” And with that Tommy Tit had said good-bye and flitted away.

Peter was thinking of that young orchard now, as he sat in the moonlight trying to make up his mind where to go. The thought of those young peach trees made his mouth water. It was a long way up to the orchard on the hill, a very long way, and Peter was wondering if it really was safe to go. He had just about made up his mind to try it, for Peter is very, very fond of the bark of young peach trees, when thump! something dropped out of the sky at his very feet.

It startled Peter so that he nearly tumbled over backward. And right at the same instant came the fierce, angry scream of Hooty the Owl. That almost made Peter’s heart stop beating, although he knew that Hooty couldn’t get him down there in the Old Briar-patch. When Peter got his wits together and his heart didn’t go so jumpy, he looked to see what had dropped so close to him out of the sky. His big eyes grew bigger than ever, and he rubbed them to

make quite sure that he really saw what he thought he saw. Yes, there was no doubt about it--there at his feet lay Danny Meadow Mouse!