

CHAPTER XV

Peter Rabbit Is Caught in a Snare

WHEN Peter Rabbit, reaching up to nibble the bark of one of Farmer Brown's young trees, felt something tugging at one of his hind legs, he was so startled that he jumped to get away. Instead of doing this, he fell flat on his face. The thing on his hind leg had tightened and held him fast. A great fear came to Peter Rabbit, and lying there in the snow, he kicked and struggled with all his might. But the more he kicked, the tighter grew that hateful thing on his leg! Finally he grew too tired to kick any more and lay still. The dreadful thing that held him hurt his leg, but it didn't pull when he lay still.

When he had grown a little calmer, Peter sat up to examine the thing which held him so fast. It was something like one of the blackberry vines he had sometimes tripped over, only it was bright and shiny, and had no branches or tiny prickles, and one end was fastened to a stake. Peter tried to bite off

the shiny thing, but even his great, sharp front teeth couldn't cut it. Then Peter knew what it was. It was wire! It was a snare which Farmer Brown had set to catch him, and which he had walked right into because he had been so greedy for the bark of the young peach tree that he had not used his eyes to look out for danger.

Oh, how Peter Rabbit did wish that he had not been so curious to know what Farmer Brown had been doing that day, and that he had gone straight home as he had meant to do, instead of trying to get one more meal of young peach bark! Big tears rolled down Peter's cheeks. What should he do? What *could* he do? For a long time Peter sat in the moonlight, trying to think of something to do. At last he thought of the stake to which that hateful wire was fastened. The stake was of wood, and Peter's teeth would cut wood. Peter's heart gave a great leap of hope, and he began at once to dig away the snow from around the stake, and then settled himself to gnaw the stake in two.

Peter had been hard at work on the stake a long time and had it a little more than half cut through, when he heard a loud sniff down at the other end of the orchard. He looked up to see--whom do you think? Why, Bowser the Hound! He hadn't seen Peter yet, but he had already found Peter's tracks,

and it would be but a few minutes before he found Peter himself.

Poor Peter Rabbit! There wasn't time to finish cutting off the stake. What could he do? He made a frightened jump just as he had when he first felt the wire tugging at his leg. Just as before, he was thrown flat on his face. He scrambled to his feet and jumped again, only to be thrown just as before. Just then Bowser the Hound saw him and opening his mouth sent forth a great roar. Peter made one more frantic jump. Snap! the stake had broken! Peter pitched forward on his head, turned a somersault, and scrambled to his feet. He was free at last! That is, he could run, but after him dragged a piece of the stake.

How Peter did run! It was hard work, for you know he had to drag that piece of stake after him. But he did it, and just in time he crawled into the old stone wall on one side of the orchard, while Bowser the Hound barked his disappointment to the moon.