

CHAPTER XX
Timid Danny Meadow Mouse

DANNY Meadow Mouse is timid. Everybody says so, and what everybody says ought to be so. But just as anybody can make a mistake sometimes, so can everybody. Still, in this case, it is quite likely that everybody is right. Danny Meadow Mouse *is* timid. Ask Peter Rabbit. Ask Sammy Jay. Ask Striped Chipmunk. They will all tell you the same thing. Sammy Jay might even tell you that Danny is afraid of his own shadow, or that he tries to run away from his own tail. Of course this isn't true. Sammy Jay likes to say mean things. It isn't fair to Danny Meadow Mouse to believe what Sammy Jay says.

But the fact is Danny certainly is timid. More than this, he isn't ashamed of it--not the least little bit.

"You see, it's this way," said Danny, as he sat on his doorstep one sunny morning talking to his friend, old Mr. Toad. "If I weren't afraid, I wouldn't

be all the time watching out, and if I weren't all the time watching out, I wouldn't have any more chance than that foolish red ant running across in front of you."

Old Mr. Toad looked where Danny was pointing, and his tongue darted out and back again so quickly that Danny wasn't sure that he saw it at all, but when he looked for the ant it was nowhere to be seen, and there was a satisfied twinkle in Mr. Toad's eyes. There was an answering twinkle in Danny's own eyes as he continued.

"No, sir," said he, "I wouldn't stand a particle more chance than that foolish ant did. Now if I were big and strong, like Old Man Coyote, or had swift wings, like Skimmer the Swallow, or were so homely and ugly-looking that no one wanted me, like--like--" Danny hesitated and then finished rather lamely, "like some folks I know, I suppose I wouldn't be afraid."

Old Mr. Toad looked up sharply when Danny mentioned homely and ugly-looking people, but Danny was gazing far out across the Green Meadows and looked so innocent that Mr. Toad concluded that he couldn't have had him in mind.

"Well," said he, thoughtfully scratching his nose, "I suppose you may be right, but for my part fear seems a very foolish thing. Now, I don't know what it

is. I mind my own business, and no one ever bothers me. I should think it would be a very uncomfortable feeling.”

“It is,” replied Danny, “but, as I said before, it is a very good thing to keep one on guard when there are as many watching for one as there are for me. Now there’s Mr. Blacksnake and--”

“Where?” exclaimed old Mr. Toad, turning as pale as a toad can turn, and looking uneasily and anxiously in every direction.

Danny turned his head to hide a smile. If old Mr. Toad wasn’t showing fear, no one ever did. “Oh,” said he, “I didn’t mean that he is anywhere around here now. What I was going to say was that there is Mr. Blacksnake and Granny Fox and Reddy Fox and Redtail the Hawk and Hooty the Owl and others I might name, always watching for a chance to make a dinner from poor little me. Do you wonder that I am afraid most of the time?”

“No,” replied old Mr. Toad. “No, I don’t wonder that you are afraid. It must be dreadful to feel hungry eyes are watching for you every minute of the day and night, too.”

“Oh, it’s not so bad,” replied Danny. “It’s rather exciting. Besides, it keeps my wits sharp all the time. I am afraid I should find life very dull indeed if, like you, I feared nothing and nobody. By the way,

see how queerly that grass is moving over there. It looks as if Mr. Blacksnake--Why, Mr. Toad, where are you going in such a hurry?”

“I’ve just remembered an important engagement with my cousin, Grandfather Frog, at the Smiling Pool,” shouted old Mr. Toad over his shoulder, as he hurried so that he fell over his own feet.

Danny chuckled as he sat alone on his doorstep. “Oh, no, old Mr. Toad doesn’t know what fear is!” said he. “Funny how some people won’t admit what everybody can see for themselves. Now, I *am* afraid, and I’m willing to say so.”