

XVI. CHATTERER THE RED SQUIRREL JUMPS FOR HIS LIFE

It isn't very often that Chatterer the Red Squirrel knows fear. That is one reason that he is so often impudent and saucy. But once in a while a great fear takes possession of him, as when he knows that Shadow the Weasel is looking for him. You see, he knows that Shadow can go wherever he can go. There are very few of the little people of the Green Forest and the Green Meadows who do not know fear at some time or other, but it comes to Chatterer as seldom as to any one, because he is very sure of himself and his ability to hide or run away from danger.

But now as he clung to a little branch near the top of a tall pine-tree in the Green Forest and looked down at the big sharp teeth of Buster Bear drawing nearer and nearer, and listened to the deep, angry growls that made his hair stand on end, Chatterer was too frightened to think. If only he had kept his tongue still instead of saying hateful things to Buster Bear! If only he had known that Buster could climb a tree! If only he had chosen a tree near enough to other trees for him to jump across! But he had said

hateful things, he had chosen to sit in a tree which stood quite by itself, and Buster Bear could climb! Chatterer was in the worst kind of trouble, and there was no one to blame but himself. That is usually the case with those who get into trouble.

Nearer and nearer came Buster Bear, and deeper and angrier sounded his voice. Chatterer gave a little frightened gasp and looked this way and looked that way. What should he do? What could he do! The ground seemed a terrible distance below. If only he had wings like Sammy Jay! But he hadn't.

"Gr-r-r-r!" growled Buster Bear. "I'll teach you manners! I'll teach you to treat your betters with respect! I'll swallow you whole, that's what I'll do. Gr-r-r-r!"

"Oh!" cried Chatterer.

"Gr-r-r-r! I'll eat you all up to the last hair on your tail!" growled Buster, scrambling a little nearer.

"Oh! Oh!" cried Chatterer, and ran out to the very tip of the little branch to which he had

been clinging. Now if Chatterer had only known it, Buster Bear couldn't reach him way up there, because the tree was too small at the top for such a big fellow as Buster. But Chatterer didn't think of that. He gave one more frightened look down at those big teeth, then he shut his eyes and jumped--jumped straight out for the far-away ground.

It was a long, long, long way down to the ground, and it certainly looked as if such a little fellow as Chatterer must be killed. But Chatterer had learned from Old Mother Nature that she had given him certain things to help him at just such times, and one of them is the power to spread himself very flat. He did it now. He spread his arms and legs out just as far as he could, and that kept him from falling as fast and as hard as he otherwise would have done, because being spread out so flat that way, the air held him up a little. And then there was his tail, that funny little tail he is so fond of jerking when he scolds. This helped him too. It helped him keep his balance and keep from turning over and over.

Down, down, down he sailed and landed on his feet. Of course, he hit the ground pretty

hard, and for just a second he quite lost his breath. But it was only for a second, and then he was scurrying off as fast as a frightened Squirrel could. Buster Bear watched him and grinned.

"I didn't catch him that time," he growled, "but I guess I gave him a good fright and taught him a lesson."