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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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Uncle Wiggily and the Camping Boys

"Oh, Uncle Wiggily! What you think?" cried Baby Bunty one day, as she hopped up to the rabbit gentleman, who was pulling the weeds out of his carrot garden.

"What I think, Baby Bunty?" repeated Mr. Longears, smiling down one side of his pink, twinkling nose. "Well, I think lots of things, my little rabbit girl. But if you think I'm going to play tag with you this morning you are wrong. I don't have time!"

"Oh, I don't want you to play tag!" exclaimed Baby Bunty, though she was such a lively little rabbit that she nearly always wanted Uncle Wiggily to play a game of some sort. "But there's something over in the woods," she went on. "What you think it is?" and she was quite excited.

"Something over in the woods, Baby Bunty?" asked Uncle Wiggily, as he looked at one of his carrots to see if the point needed sharpening; but it didn't, I'm glad to say. "Well, what's in the woods, Baby Bunty; the Fox, the Skeezicks or the Pipsisewah?"

"Neither one, Uncle Wiggily," answered the little rabbit girl. "But there's a lot of those funny animals you call 'boys,' and they're making a snow house, and maybe they'll try to catch you, or me or Nurse Jane," and Baby Bunty looked quite worried.

"A snow house this time of year! Tut! Tut! Nonsense!" laughed Uncle Wiggily. "This is summer and there isn't any snow with which to make houses."

"Well, these boys, in the woods, are making a white house, anyhow, Uncle Wiggily," spoke the little rabbit girl, who once had lived in a hollow stump, before she came to visit the bunny gentleman. "It's a white house, and there's a lot of boys, and they're cutting down wood, and making a fire and boiling a kettle of water and oh, they're doing lots of things! I thought I'd better come and tell you."

"Hum!" said Uncle Wiggily, straightening up to rest his back, which ached from pulling the weeds out of his garden. "Yes, perhaps it is a good thing you told me, Baby Bunty. I'll go have a look at the white house the boys are putting up."

Uncle Wiggily and Baby Bunty hopped through the woods, and soon they were near that side of the forest nearest the village where real boys and girls lived. Through the green trees gleamed something white, on which the sun shone as brightly as it does at the seashore.

"There's the house," said Baby Bunty, pointing with her paw off among the trees.

"Ho! That isn't exactly a house!" Uncle Wiggily told the little rabbit girl. "That's a white tent, and those boys must be camping there. Boys like to come to the woods to camp in the summer. We'll hop a little closer and listen. Then we can tell what they are doing."

"We mustn't let 'em see us!" whispered Baby Bunty.

"Oh, no!"

"Well, no, maybe not at first," Uncle Wiggily agreed.

"But nearly all boys, especially the kind that go camping, are fond of animals, and will not hurt them. We will see what sort of boys these are, Baby Bunty."

So the bunny gentleman and the little rabbit girl hid behind the bushes and watched the camping boys, for that is what they were. They had come to spend a few weeks in the woods, living in a white tent which, at first, Baby Bunty thought was a snow house.

The boys had just come to camp, and the tent had been up only a little while. But already the lads had started a campfire; and they had hung a kettle over the blaze, and were cooking soup.

"Get some more water, somebody!" called one boy.

"And I'm not going to cut any more wood!" exclaimed another. "I've been cutting wood ever since we got here!"

"We'll take turns!" spoke a third boy.

"Look out! That soup's boiling over!" shouted a fourth.

"They're regular boys all right!" chuckled Uncle Wiggily, as he crouched under a bush with Baby Bunty. "They're so excited at coming to camp they hardly know what they're doing."

Uncle Wiggily and Baby Bunty could hear and understand what the boys said, though they themselves could not speak to the camping chaps. For a time the two rabbits watched the little lads, who were trying to get a meal. They made many mistakes, of course, such as getting the salt mixed up with the sugar, and they left the bread out of its tin box so it dried, for they had never been camping before.

"But they'll soon learn," said Uncle Wiggily.

"I hope they won't chase us, and throw stones at us," Baby Bunty remarked, as she and Mr. Longears hopped away.

"I think they are good boys," spoke the bunny gentleman.

And the camping boys were. When they had finished eating they scattered crumbs so the birds could pick them up. Larger pieces of left-over food were placed on a flat stump where the squirrels and chipmunks could get them.

Johnnie and Billie Bushytail, the two boy squirrels, saw some of this food as they were coming through the woods. The camping boys were away just then, so the squirrel chaps had no fear of going close to the white tent-house. Johnnie found a piece of bread and butter, and Billie picked up half a ginger snap.

"That shows the camping boys are kind to animals," said Uncle Wiggily, when Johnnie and Billie told him what they had found. "I hope I may get a chance to do these lads a favor."



And Uncle Wiggily had this chance sooner than he expected.

For about a week the

weather was most lovely for camping. The sun shone every day, the wind blew just enough to send the sailboat spinning about the lake and there wasn't a drop of rain.

It is rain which soaks most of the fun out of camping, just as rain takes away your fun at home. And these boys, never having camped in a tent before, gave no thought to storms.

One afternoon it began to rain. Uncle Wiggily, in his hollow stump bungalow, where he was reading the cabbage-leaf paper, heard the pitter-patter of the drops on the window, and looked up.

"Where is Baby Bunty, Nurse Jane?" asked the bunny gentleman.

"Why, she hasn't come back from the store yet," answered the muskrat lady housekeeper.

"Did she take an umbrella?" asked Uncle Wiggily.

"No," replied Nurse Jane, "she did not."

"Then she'll get soaking wet!" exclaimed Mr. Longears.

"I'll go after her with a toadstool."

You know in Woodland, near the Orange Ice Mountain, where Uncle Wiggily lived, toadstools were often used for umbrellas. Of course, some of the animal folk had regular umbrellas, but when they were in a hurry they could break off a big toadstool, or mushroom, and use that.

So Uncle Wiggily hopped out of his hollow stump bungalow, and, growing near his front gate, he found a big toadstool. Picking this, he held it over his head and hurried along through the rain to meet Baby Bunty,

who had gone to the three and five cent store for Nurse Jane.

Uncle Wiggily had to hop almost to the place where the tent of the camping boys stood before he met the little rabbit girl, half drenched.

"Oh, Uncle Wiggily! You ought to see!" cried Baby Bunty.

"There is so much water around the tent that those nice boys will be washed away, I guess!"

"Water around their tent?" repeated the bunny gentleman. "You don't say so!"

"Yes," said Baby Bunty. "The rain is coming down so hard that it is running like a little brook around the tent. The boys are inside, and I heard them saying that the water would soon come up over the cots and they wouldn't have any dry place to sleep to-night!"

"Silly boys!" exclaimed Uncle Wiggily, holding the toadstool umbrella over Baby Bunty. "They didn't know enough to dig a ditch around the outside of their tent to let the rain water run off. All campers do that, but as this is the first time these boys came to the woods I suppose they didn't know about it. Always dig a ditch, or trench, in the earth around your tent when you go camping, Baby Bunty."

"I will," promised the little rabbit girl, real serious like.

"But that isn't going to help the boys now," went on Uncle Wiggily. "I think I shall have to take a paw in this. They are good boys, and are kind to animals. I must do them a favor."

"But how can you?" asked Baby Bunty.

"Why, I, being a rabbit, am one of the best diggers in the world," went on Mr. Longears. "Still, I will need

help to dig a ditch around the tent, as it is rather large. Hop home, Baby Bunty, and tell Sammie Littletail, Toodle and Noodle Flat-Tail, the beaver boys, and Grandpa Whackum, the old beaver gentleman, to please come here. With their help I can dig the ditch."

So Baby Bunty, taking the toadstool umbrella, hopped away, and Uncle Wiggily, to await her return, hid under a thick-branched pine tree which kept off most of the rain. The drops pelted down, and around the tent of the camping boys was almost a flood. Night was coming on, too, and before morning the water would rise up so high that it would wet the feet of the boys in their beds.

Pretty soon, just about dusk, when it was still raining hard, along came Sammie Littletail, the rabbit boy, Toodle and Noodle the beavers, with their broad, flat tails, and Grandpa Whackum, the oldest beaver of them all. Beavers just love to work in the water and they can dig dirt canals better than most boys.

"Lively now, my friends!" called Uncle Wiggily, coming out from under the pine tree. "We'll dig a ditch around the tent for the kind boys. They won't see us, as they are inside, and probably will not come out in the rain." So Uncle Wiggily, Sammie and the beavers began work. Quickly and silently they dug and dug and dug in the soft earth, piling the dirt to one side, and making a trench so that the rain water could run off into the brook. And soon the little pond that had formed around the tent of the camping boys had drained away.

"Now they will have no more trouble," said Uncle Wiggily as he and his friends, all wet and muddy, finished the trench. "We can go home."

Home they went, through the rain, to get something to eat and dry out. And in the morning, though it still rained, no water rose inside the boys' tent. And none came through the roof, for that was like an umbrella, the canvas cloth being stretched over the ridge-pole.

"Oh, look!" cried one boy, coming to the flap of the tent, as the front of the canvas house is called.

"Someone has dug a ditch around our camp, and now we'll keep dry!"

"Why, it's a regular little canal!" exclaimed a second boy. "It wasn't there yesterday!"

"Who did it?" asked the other lads.

But none of them knew, and I hope you will not tell them, for I want to keep it a secret.

And when the rain stopped, the ground around the tent dried out very quickly because the proper ditch had been dug around it. And the camping boys put out on the flat stump many good things for the animal folk to eat. And the next time those boys went camping they knew enough to make a trench around their tent.