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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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Uncle Wiggily And A Big Rat

When Uncle Wiggily had fed the little birds in the nest, after he and the bumble bee had saved them from the snake, as I told you in another story, the mamma bird said she could not do enough for the old gentleman rabbit.

"I will have my little ones sing a song for you," she went on. "Come now, birdies, sing for Uncle Wiggily." So this is the song the little birds in the nest sang:

"Uncle Wiggily is good,
Uncle Wiggily is kind,
And we hope with all our hearts,
That his fortune he may find.
"Gold and silver, diamonds, too,
Ice-cream cones and candy sticks,
And we hope that he can buy,
Two red monkeys who do tricks."

"Oh! that is a very nice song, birdies," said the rabbit, as he took off his hat and made a low bow. "But," he went on, "I don't know as I care for red monkeys who do tricks. What in the world would I do with them?"

"Why, you could give them to us and they would amuse us when our mamma was away," said a little bird who had some feathers sticking crossways in her tail.

"Yes, I suppose I could give you the monkeys," went on the old gentleman rabbit, "but I hardly expect to find any in my travels--especially red ones."

"Won't you stay to supper with us?" asked the mamma bird, "and we would also be pleased to have you stay all night. Oh, no!" she suddenly exclaimed. "I don't see how you can stay all night."

"I can if you want me to," said Uncle Wiggily, for he thought perhaps the bird was afraid the snake might come back in the darkness, and the old gentleman rabbit made up his mind that if the crawly creature did sneak up, he would hit it with his crutch.

"Well, of course we'd like to have you stay," said the mamma bird, slowly, "but the truth of the matter is that I have no place for you to sleep. You see, our nest is so small; and besides, I never knew of a rabbit in a nest, except at Easter time."

"Of course," agreed Uncle Wiggily, "I never thought of that. However, it is very kind of you, and I'll travel on until I find a hollow stump, or some place like that where I can sleep."

"Oh, mamma!" exclaimed a little boy birdie, "why can't Uncle Wiggily make a tent, and sleep in it right near our nest? He can pretend that he is camping out."

"The very thing!" cried the rabbit. "I'll do it. But of what can I make a tent?"

"We can give you the sticks and the cloth," said the mamma bird, so she showed Uncle Wiggily where there were some nice long sticks, like fishing poles, and some old sheets from a bed that no one wanted.

"That will make a fine tent!" said Uncle Wiggily, "and I'm sure I will sleep in it very nicely."

So he set to work to make the tent. First he stuck one stick in the ground, and then he stuck another stick in, and then still another, until he had about seven sticks sticking around in a circle. Next the mamma bird pulled them together at the top, just like the Indians' tents in the Wild West show, and then she and all the other little birdies tied them with blades of grass for strings, and helped put the cloth around to cover up the sticks.

Then, if you'll believe me, and I hope you do, there was the tent, pointed on top and round at the bottom, just like those chocolate drops with white cream inside that are so nice and soft.

"Ha! this is a very fine tent indeed!" exclaimed Uncle Wiggily. "Now I'll move my valise and crutch inside, and I'll feel right at home."

"And we'll help you make your bed," said the little birds, and away some of the strongest of them flew around, gathering up in their bills dozens of soft leaves, and soon they had made as fine a bed, almost, as baby's crib.

Then supper was ready. And now, let me see, what did they have for supper? Oh, I know! There was some rose leaf pie, and some violets with sugar on, and some bird seed boiled in molasses, and for Uncle Wiggily there was the loveliest turnip cake, with carrot frosting on top, that you have ever seen. Oh! it was most delicious, and it makes me hungry even to typewrite about it, and I'm sure you would like it if you had some.

"Now it's bedtime for you birdies," said the mamma, and she sang them a little lullaby and soon their eyes were tightly shut.

"Yes, and I guess I had better get in my tent," said the rabbit, so in he crawled beneath the cloth that was stretched over the poles, down upon the bed of leaves he lay, and soon he too was fast, fast asleep.

Well, along about in the middle of the night Uncle Wiggily was awakened by hearing something scratching on the side of the tent.

"Ha, hum! I wonder what that can be?" he asked.

"Perhaps it is the bad snake coming back. If it is I must get ready with my crutch."

So he reached out in the darkness to get hold of the crutch and just then he saw a light flickering. And a moment later something big and black, with long whiskers, and long sharp teeth, came right inside the tent. And Uncle Wiggily saw that it was a big rat, and that rat had a bottle, and in it were a lot of flickering lightning bugs, and that was the lantern the rat carried, so that he could see in the dark.



"Oh, hello! So you're in here, eh?" asked the rat as he waved his whiskers to and fro at Uncle Wiggily. "Well, I'm disappointed."

"Why so?" asked the rabbit, as he got his crutch and stood ready to hit the rat in case he sprang forward to use his sharp teeth. "Why are you disappointed?"

"Because I thought the birds were in here," said the rat. "I mean to take them all off to my den and make them sing me to sleep. But since you are here, I'll begin on you first, and then I'll go out and pull down the birds' nest."

"Oh, no, you can't do that," said Uncle Wiggily firmly.

"Why not?" asked the rat, surprised-like. "Who will stop me?"

"I will!" bravely cried Uncle Wiggily, and with that he raised his crutch, and he tickled that rat right on the end of his long tail. And the rat was so surprised that he thought he had been struck by a policeman's club. So he jumped around, and, as he did so, Uncle Wiggily threw a piece of cherry pie at him, and it was all soft and squashy like, and the juice ran down in the rat's eyes, and so blinded him that he couldn't see to bite the rabbit, or even a piece of cheese.

"Now, you get right out of this tent, and don't you dare to harm the birds!" cried the old gentleman rabbit, and that rat went right out, taking his long thin tail with him, but forgetting his lightning bug lantern, which he left on the ground.

So Uncle Wiggily looked out to make sure that the rat didn't go near the birds' nest and the bad creature didn't, but he scurried back to his hole in the rocks, feeling quite savage-like and more disappointed than ever.

Next the rabbit took the cork out of the rat's bottle-lantern and he let the poor lightning bugs go, and they were very thankful. And then the rabbit stretched out on the leaves again, and went to sleep until morning and nothing more disturbed him.