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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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Uncle Wiggily And The Willow Tree

"Well, it's all settled!" exclaimed Uncle Wiggily Longears, the rabbit gentleman, one day, as he hopped up the steps of his hollow stump bungalow where Nurse Jane Fuzzy Wuzzy, his muskrat lady housekeeper, was fanning herself with a cabbage leaf tied to her tail.

"It's all settled."

"What is?" asked Miss Fuzzy Wuzzy. "You don't mean to tell me anything has happened to you?" and she looked quite anxious.

"No, I'm all right," laughed Uncle Wiggily, "and I hope you are the same. What I meant was that it's all settled where we are going to spend our vacation this Summer."

"Oh, tell me where!" exclaimed the muskrat lady clapping her paws, anxious like.

"In a hollow stump bungalow, just like this, but in the woods instead of in the country," answered Uncle Wiggily.

"Oh, that will be fine!" cried Miss Fuzzy Wuzzy. "I love the woods. When are we to go?"

"Very soon now," answered the bunny gentleman uncle.

"You may begin to pack up as quickly as you please."

And Nurse Jane and Uncle Wiggily moved to the woods very next day and his adventures began.

I guess most of you know about the rabbit gentleman and his muskrat lady housekeeper who nursed him when he was ill with the rheumatism. Uncle Wiggily had lots and lots of adventures, about which I have told you in the books before this one.

He had traveled about seeking his fortune, he had even gone sailing in his airship, and once he met Mother Goose and all her friends from Old King Cole down to Little Jack Horner.

Uncle Wiggily had many friends among the animal boys and girls. There was Sammie and Susie Littletail, the rabbits, who have a book all to themselves; just as have Jackie and Peetie Bow Wow, the puppy dog boys, and Jollie and Jillie Longtail, the mice children.

"And I s'pose we'll meet all your friends in the woods, won't we, Uncle Wiggily?" asked Nurse Jane, as they moved from the old hollow stump bungalow to the new one.

"Oh, yes, I s'pose so, of course," he laughed in answer, as he pulled his tall silk hat more tightly down on his head, fastened on his glasses and took his red, white and blue striped barber pole rheumatism crutch that Nurse Jane had gnawed for him out of a cornstalk.

So, once upon a time, not very many years ago, as all good stories should begin, Uncle Wiggily and Nurse Jane found themselves in the woods. It was lovely among the trees, and as soon as the rabbit gentleman had helped Miss Fuzzy Wuzzy put the hollow stump bungalow to rights he started out for a walk.

"I want to see what sort of adventures I shall have in the woods," said Mr. Longears as he hopped along. Now in these woods lived, among many other creatures good and bad, two skillery-scalery alligators who were not exactly friends of the bunny uncle. But don't let that worry you, for though the alligators, and other unpleasant animals, may, once in a while, make trouble for Uncle Wiggily, I'll never really let them hurt him. I'll fix that part all right!

So, one day, the skillery-scalery alligator with the humps on his tail, and his brother, another skillery-scalery chap, whose tail was double jointed, were taking a walk through the woods together just as Uncle Wiggily was doing.

"Brother," began the hump-tailed 'gator (which I call him for short), "brother, wouldn't you like a nice rabbit?"

"Indeed I would," answered the double-jointed tail 'gator, who could wobble his flippers both ways. "And I know of no nicer rabbit than Uncle Wiggily Longears."

"The very same one about whom I was thinking!" exclaimed the other alligator. "Let's catch him!"

"That's what we'll do!" said the double-jointed chap.

"We'll hide in the woods until he comes along, as he does every day, and the we'll jump out and grab him.

Oh, you yum-yum!"

"Fine!" grunted his brother. "Come on!"

Off they crawled through the woods, and pretty soon they came to a willow tree, where the branches grew

so low down that they looked like a curtain that had unwound itself off the roller, when the cat hangs on it. "This is the place for us to hide—by the weeping willow tree," said the skillery-scalery alligator with bumps on his tail.

"The very place," agreed his brother.

So they hid behind the thick branches of the tree, which had leafed out for early spring, and there the two bad creatures waited.

Just before this Uncle Wiggily himself had started out from his hollow stump bungalow to walk in the woods and across the fields, as he did every day.



"I wonder what sort of an adventure I shall have this time?" he said to himself. "I hope it will be a real nice one."

Oh! If Uncle Wiggily had known what was in store for him, I think he would have stayed in his hollow stump bungalow. But never mind, I'll make it all come out right in

the end, you see if I don't. I don't know just how I'm going to do it, yet, but I'll find a way, never fear.

Uncle Wiggily hopped on and on, now and then swinging his red-white-and-blue-striped rheumatism crutch like a cane, because he felt so young and spry and spring-like. Pretty soon he came to the willow tree. He was sort of

looking up at it, wondering if a nibble of some of the green leaves would not do him good, when, all of a sudden, out jumped the two bad alligators and grabbed the bunny gentleman.

"Now we have you!" cried the humped-tail 'gator.

"And you can't get away from us," said the other chap—the double-jointed tail one.

"Oh, please let me go!" begged Uncle Wiggily, but they hooked their claws in his fur, and pulled him back under the tree, which held its branches so low. I told you it was a weeping willow tree, and just now it was weeping, I think, because Uncle Wiggily was in such trouble.

"Let's see now," said the double-jointed tail alligator.

"I'll carry this rabbit home, and then—"

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" interrupted the other, and not very politely, either. "I'll carry him myself. Why, I caught him as much as you did!"

"Well, maybe you did, but I saw him first."

"I don't care! It was my idea. I first thought of this way of catching him!"

And then those two alligators disputed, and talked very unpleasantly, indeed, to one another.

But, all the while, they kept tight hold of the bunny uncle, so he could not get away.

"Well," said the double-jointed tail alligator after a while, "we must settle this one way or the other. Am I to carry him to our den, or you?"

"Me! I'll do it. If you took him you'd keep him all for yourself. I know you!"

"No, I wouldn't! But that's just what you'd do. I know you only too well. No, if I can't carry this rabbit home myself, you shan't!"

"I say the same thing. I'm going to have my rights."

Now, while the two bad alligators were talking this way they did not pay much attention to Uncle Wiggily. They held him so tightly in their claws that he could not get away, but he could use his own paws, and, when the two bad creatures were talking right in each other's face, and using big words, Uncle Wiggily reached up and cut off a piece of willow wood with the bark on.

And then, still when the 'gators were disputing, and not looking, the bunny uncle made himself a whistle out of the willow tree stick. He loosened the bark, which came off like a kid glove, and then he cut a place to blow his breath in, and another place to let the air out and so on, until he had a very fine whistle indeed, almost as loud-blowing as those the policemen have to stop the automobiles from splashing mud on you so a trolley car can bump into you.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said the hump-tail alligator at last. "Since you won't let me carry him home, and I won't let you, let's both carry him together. You take hold of him on one side, and I'll take the other."

"Good!" cried the second alligator.

"Oh, ho! I guess not!" cried the bunny uncle suddenly.

"I guess you won't either, or both of you take me off to your den. No, indeed!"

"Why not?" asked the hump-tailed 'gator, sort of impolite like and sarcastic.

"Because I'm going to blow my whistle and call the police!" went on the bunny uncle. "Toot! Toot! Tootity-ti-toot-toot!"

And then and there he blew such a loud, shrill blast on his willow tree whistle that the alligators had to put their paws over their ears. And when they did that they had to let go of bunny uncle. He had his tall silk hat down over his ears, so it didn't matter how loudly he blew the whistle. He couldn't hear it.

"Toot! Toot! Tootity-toot-toot!" he blew on the willow whistle.

"Oh, stop! Stop!" cried the hump-tailed 'gator.

"Come on, run away before the police come!" said his brother. And out from under the willow tree they both ran, leaving Uncle Wiggily safely behind.

"Well," said the bunny gentleman as he hopped along home to his bungalow, "it is a good thing I learned, when a boy rabbit, how to make whistles." And I think so myself.