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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Tale of Fatty Coon: Fatty Discovers Mrs. Turtles Secret (3/20)

After his adventure with the goshawk Fatty Coon did not go near the tree-tops for a long time. Whenever he left home he would crawl down the old poplar tree in which he lived; and he wouldn't climb a single tree until he came home again. Somehow, he felt safer on the ground. You see, he hadn't forgotten the fright he had had, nor how the goshawk's claws had hurt his back. It was just three days after his scare, to be exact, when Fatty Coon found himself on the bank of the creek which flowed slowly into Swift River. Fatty had been looking for frogs, but he had had no luck at all. To tell the truth, Fatty was a little too young to catch frogs easily, even when he found one; and he was a good deal too fat, for he was so plump that he was not very spry.

Now, Fatty was hiding behind some tall rushes, and his sharp little eyes were looking all about him, and his nose was twitching as he sniffed the air. He wished he might find a frog. But not one frog appeared. Fatty began to think that some other coon must have visited the creek just before him and caught them all. And then he forgot all about frogs.

Yes! Frogs passed completely out of Fatty Coon's mind. For whom should he spy but Mrs. Turtle! He saw her little black head first, bobbing along through the water of the creek. She was swimming toward the bank where Fatty was hidden. And pretty soon she pulled herself out of the water and waddled a short distance along the sand at the edge of the creek.



Mrs. Turtle stopped then; and for a few minutes she was very busy about something. First she dug a hole in the sand. And Fatty wondered what she was looking for. But he kept very quiet. And after a time Mrs. Turtle splashed into the creek again and paddled away. But before she left she scooped sand into the hole she had dug. Before she left the place she looked all around, as if to make sure that no one had seen her. And as she waddled slowly to the water Fatty could see that she was smiling as if she was very well pleased about something. She seemed to have a secret.

Fatty Coon had grown very curious, as he watched Mrs. Turtle. And just as soon as she was out of sight he came out from his hiding place in the tall reeds and trotted down to the edge of the creek. He went straight to the spot where Mrs. Turtle had dug the hole and filled it up again. And Fatty was so eager to know what she had been doing that he began to dig in the very spot where Mrs. Turtle had dug before him.

It took Fatty Coon only about six seconds to discover Mrs. Turtle's secret. For he did not have to paw away much of the sand before he came upon—what do you suppose? Eggs! Turtles' eggs! Twenty-seven round, white eggs, which Mrs. Turtle had left there in the warm sand to hatch. THAT was why she looked all around to make sure that no one saw her. THAT was why she seemed so pleased. For Mrs. Turtle fully expected that after a time twenty-seven little turtles would hatch from those eggs—just as chickens do—and dig their way out of the sand.

But it never happened that way at all. For as soon as he got over his surprise at seeing them, Fatty Coon began at once to eat those twenty-seven eggs. They were delicious. And as he finished the last one he couldn't help thinking how lucky he had been.