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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

The Tale of Fatty Coon: Fatty Visits The Smoke-House (15/20)

The winter was fast going. And one fine day in February Fatty Coon crept out of his mother's house to enjoy the warm sunshine—and see what he could find to eat.

Fatty was much thinner than he had been in the fall. He had spent so much of the time sleeping that he had really eaten very little. And now he hardly knew himself as he looked at his sides. They no longer stuck out as they had once.

After nosing about the swamp and the woods all the afternoon Fatty decided that there was no use in trying to get a meal there. The ground was covered with snow. And except for rabbit tracks—and a few squirrels'—he could find nothing that even suggested food. And looking at those tracks only made him hungrier than ever.

For a few minutes Fatty thought deeply. And then he turned about and went straight toward Farmer Green's place. He waited behind the fence just beyond Farmer Green's house; and when it began to grow dark he crept across the barnyard.

As Fatty passed a small, low building he noticed a delicious smell. And he stopped right there. He had gone far enough. The door was open a little way. And after

one quick look all around—to make sure there was nobody to see him—Fatty slipped inside.

It was almost dark inside Farmer Green's smokehouse—for that was what the small, low building was called. It was almost dark; but Fatty could see just as well as you and I can see in the daytime. There was a long row of hams hung up in a line. Underneath them were white ashes, where Farmer Green had built wood fires, to smoke the hams. But the fires were out, now; and Fatty was in no danger of being burned.



The hams were what Fatty Coon had smelled. And the hams were what Fatty intended to eat. He decided that he would eat them all—though of course he could never have done that—at least, not in one night; nor in a week, either. But when it came to eating, Fatty's courage never failed him. He would have tried to eat an elephant, if he had had the chance.

Fatty did not stop to look long at that row of hams. He climbed a post that ran up the side of the house and he crept out along the pole from which the hams were hung.

He stopped at the very first ham he came to. There was no sense in going any further. And Fatty dropped on top of the ham and in a twinkling he had torn off a big, delicious mouthful.

Fatty could not eat fast enough. He wished he had two mouths—he was so hungry. But he did very well, with only ONE. In no time at all he had made a great hole in the ham. And he had no idea of stopping. But he did stop. He stopped very suddenly. For the first thing he knew, something threw him right down upon the floor. And the ham fell on top of him and nearly knocked him senseless.

He choked and spluttered; for the ashes filled his mouth and his eyes, and his ears, too. For a moment he lay there on his back; but soon he managed to kick the heavy ham off his stomach and then he felt a little better. But he was terribly frightened. And though his eyes smarted so he could hardly see, he sprang up and found the doorway.

Fatty swallowed a whole mouthful of ashes as he dashed across the barnyard. And he never stopped running until he was almost home. He was puzzled. Try as he would, he couldn't decide what it was that had flung him upon the floor. And when he told his mother about his adventure—as he did a whole month later—she didn't know exactly what had happened, either.

"It was some sort of trap, probably," Mrs. Coon said. But for once Mrs. Coon was mistaken.

It was very simple. In his greedy haste Fatty had merely bitten through the cord that fastened the ham to the pole. And of course it had at once fallen, carrying Fatty with it!

But what do you suppose? Afterward, when Fatty had grown up, and had children of his own, he often told

them about the time he had escaped from the trap in Farmer Green's smokehouse.

Fatty's children thought it very exciting. It was their favorite story. And they made their father tell it over and over again.