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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Tale of Fatty Coon: The Barber-Shop Again (14/20)

Although Fatty Coon never could get Jimmy Rabbit and his brother to play barber-shop with him again, Fatty saw no reason why he should not play the game without them. So one day he led his brother Blackie over to the old hollow sycamore. His sisters, Fluffy and Cutey, wanted to go too. But Fatty would not let them. "Girls can't be barbers," he said. And of course they could find no answer to that.

As soon as Fatty and Blackie reached the old sycamore I am sorry to say that a dispute arose. Each of them wanted to use his own tail for the barber's pole. They couldn't both stick their tails through the hole in the tree at the same time. So they finally agreed to take turns.

Playing barber-shop wasn't so much fun as they had expected, because nobody would come near to get his hair cut. You see, the smaller forest-people were all afraid to go inside that old sycamore where Fatty and Blackie were. There was no telling when the two brothers might get so hungry they would seize and eat a rabbit or a squirrel or a chipmunk. And you know it isn't wise to run any such risk as that.

Fatty offered to cut Blackie's hair. But Blackie remembered what his mother had said when Fatty came

home with his moustache gone and his head all rough and uneven. So Blackie wouldn't let Fatty touch him. But HE offered to cut Fatty's hair—what there was left of it. "No, thank you!" said Fatty. "I only get my hair cut once a month." Of course, he had never had his hair cut except that once, in his whole life.



Now, since there was so little to do inside the hollow tree, Fatty and Blackie kept quarreling. Blackie would no sooner stick his tail through the hole in the side of the tree than Fatty would want HIS turn. And when Fatty had succeeded in squeezing HIS tail out through the opening Blackie would insist that Fatty's time was up.

It was Fatty's turn, and Blackie was shouting to him to stand aside and give him a chance.

"I won't!" said Fatty. "I'm going to stay here just as long as I please."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when he gave a sharp squeal, as if something hurt him. And he tried to pull his tail out of the hole. He wanted to get it out now. But alas! it would not come! It was caught fast! And the harder Fatty pulled the more it hurt him.

"Go out and see what's the matter!" he cried to Blackie. But Blackie wouldn't stir. He was afraid to leave the shelter of the hollow tree.

"It may be a bear that has hold of your tail," he told Fatty. And somehow, that idea made Fatty tremble all over.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" he wailed. "What shall I do? Oh! whatever shall I do?" He began to cry. And Blackie cried too. How Fatty wished that his mother was there to tell him what to do!

But he knew of no way to fetch her. Even if she were at home she could never hear him calling from inside the tree. So Fatty gave up all hope of her helping.

"Please, Mr. Bear, let go of my tail!" he cried, when he could stand the pain no longer.

The only answer that came was a low growl, which frightened Fatty and Blackie more than ever. And then, just as they both began to howl at the top of their voices Fatty's tail was suddenly freed. He was pulling on it so hard that he fell all in a heap on the floor of the barber-shop. And that surprised him.

But he was still more surprised when he heard his mother say—

"Stop crying and come out—both of you!" Fatty and Blackie scrambled out of the hollow sycamore. Fatty looked all around. But there was no bear to be seen anywhere—no one but his mother.

"Did you frighten the bear away, Mother?" he asked.

"There was no bear," Mrs. Coon told him. "And it's lucky for you that there wasn't. I saw your tail sticking out of this tree and I thought I would teach you a lesson. Now, don't ever do such a foolish thing again. Just think what a fix you would have been in if Johnnie Green had

come along. He could have caught you just as easily as anything."

Fatty Coon was so glad to be free once more that he promised to be good forever after. And he was just as good as any little coon could be—all the rest of that day.