



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Mr. 'Possum

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Mr. 'Possum lived in a tree in the woods where Mr. Bear lived, and one morning just before spring Mr. 'Possum awoke very hungry.

He ran around to Mr. Squirrel's house and tried to get an invitation to breakfast, but Mr. Squirrel had only enough for himself. He knew that Mr. 'Possum always lived on his neighbors when he could, so he said: "Of course you have been to breakfast long ago, Mr. 'Possum, you are such a smart fellow, so I will not offer you any."

Mr. 'Possum of course said he had, and that he only dropped in to make a call; he was on his way to Mr. Rabbit's house.

But he met with no better success at Mr. Rabbit's, for he only put his nose out of the door, and when he saw who was there, said: "I am as busy as I can be getting ready for my spring planting. Will you come in and help sort seeds?"

Mr. Rabbit knew the easiest way to be rid of Mr. 'Possum was to ask him to work.

"I would gladly help you," replied Mr. 'Possum, "but I am in a great hurry this morning. I have some important business with Mr. Bear and I only stopped to say how-do-you-do."

"Mr. Bear, I am afraid, will not be receiving to-day," said Mr. Rabbit. "It is rather early for him to be up, isn't it?"

"I thought as the sun was nice and warm he might venture out, and I thought it would please him to have me there to welcome him," said Mr. 'Possum. "Besides that, I wish to see him on business."

Now, Mr. 'Possum knew well enough that Mr. Bear would not be up, and he wanted to find him sleeping, and soundly, too.

He went to the door and knocked softly, then he waited, and as he did not hear any moving inside he went to a window and looked in. There was Mr. Bear's chair and pipe just as he left them when he went to bed. He looked in the bedroom window and he could see in the bed a big heap of bedclothes, and just the tiniest tip of Mr. Bear's nose.

Mr. 'Possum listened, and he trembled a little, for he could hear Mr. Bear breathing very loud, and it sounded anything but pleasant.

"Oh, he is sound asleep for another week!" said Mr. 'Possum. "What is the use of being afraid?" He walked around the house until he came to the pantry window; then he stopped and raised the sash.

He put in one foot and sat on the sill and listened. All was still, so he slid off to the floor. Mr. 'Possum looked around Mr. Bear's well-filled pantry. He did not know where to begin, he was so hungry.

He became so interested and was so greedy that he forgot all about that he was in Mr. Bear's pantry, and he stayed on and on and ate and ate.

Then he fell asleep, and the first thing he knew a pair of shining eyes were looking in the window and a big head with a red mouth full of long white teeth was poked into the pantry.



Mr. 'Possum thought his time had come, so he just closed his eyes and pretended he was dead, but he peeked a little so as to see what happened.

The big head was followed by a body, and when it was on the sill Mr. 'Possum saw it was Mr. Fox, and the next thing he knew Mr. Fox came off the sill with a bang and hit a pan of beans and then knocked over a jar of preserves.

The noise was enough to awaken all the bears for miles around, and Mr. 'Possum was frightened nearly to death, for he heard Mr. Bear growling in the next room.

While Mr. Fox was on the floor and trying to get up on his feet Mr. 'Possum jumped up and was out of the window like a flash. Mr. Fox saw something, but he did not know what, and before he could make his escape the door of the pantry opened and there stood Mr. Bear with a candle in his hand, looking in.

"Oh, oh!" he growled, "so you are trying to rob me while I'm taking my sleep," and he sprang at Mr. Fox.

"Wait, wait," said Mr. Fox. "Let me explain, my dear Mr. Bear. You are mistaken; I was trying to protect your home. I saw your window open and knew you were asleep, and when I got in the window the thief attacked me and nearly killed me and now you are blaming me for it. You are most ungrateful. I shall know another time what to do."

Mr. Bear looked at him. His mouth did not show any signs of food, and Mr. Fox opened his mouth and told him to look.

"I wonder who it could have been?" he said, when he was satisfied that Mr. Fox was not the thief. "It may have been that 'Possum fellow. I'll go over to his house

in the morning."

The next morning Mr. Bear called on Mr. 'Possum. He found him sleeping soundly, and when he at last opened the door he was rubbing his eyes as though he was not half awake.

"Why, how do you do?" he said, when he saw Mr. Bear. "I did not suppose you were up yet."

"You didn't?" asked Mr. Bear, and then he stared at Mr. 'Possum's coat. "What is the matter with your coat?" he asked. "You have white hairs sticking out all over you, and the rest of your coat is almost white, too."

Now Mr. 'Possum had a black coat before, and he ran to the mirror and looked at himself. It was true; he was almost white. He knew what had happened. He was so frightened when he was caught in Mr. Bear's pantry by Mr. Fox, and heard Mr. Bear growl, that he had turned nearly white with fright.

"I have been terribly ill," he told Mr. Bear, going back to the door. "And I have been here all alone this winter. It was a terrible sickness; I guess that is what has caused it."

Mr. Bear went away, shaking his head. "That fellow is crafty," he said. "I feel sure he was the thief, and yet he certainly does look sick."

After that all the opossums were of dull white color, with long, white hairs scattered here and there over their fur. They were never able to outgrow the mark the thieving Mr. 'Possum left upon his race.

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