



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Those who watched Mr. Raccoon

Abbie Phillips Walker

When Mr. Raccoon came to the woods to live, none of the wood dwellers had ever met any of his family, so, of course, they knew nothing about the curious habit the Raccoon has of washing all meat before eating it.

One day, as Reddy Fox was trotting through the woods, he spied Mr. Raccoon with a basket on his arm, going toward the river that ran through the woods. He did not see Reddy, and as Reddy dearly loves to watch when he is not seen, he quickly hid himself behind some bushes to see what Mr. Raccoon was going to do. To his astonishment, he saw him take from the basket some meat and, holding it in his forepaws, souse it about in the water and then eat it.

"That is the funniest thing I ever saw," thought Reddy Fox. "I must tell all the wood folk about this, and we will all come down here and watch him."

But before he did this, Reddy made sure that Mr. Raccoon came each day to the river to do the same thing, for he was rather doubtful that this was a regular thing with Mr. Raccoon. Reddy could not understand why he did not eat the meat just as he did, just as soon as he got it.

Mr. Raccoon has sharp eyes, and one day while Reddy was watching, he became too curious and poked his head out too far from his hiding place so that Mr. Raccoon caught sight of him. "Watching me, is he?" thought Mr. Raccoon. "Well, I will fix him tomorrow."

Reddy had just decided that tomorrow would be the day he would bring along all the wood folks to watch the strange habit Mr. Raccoon had. And so, the next day, Mr. Squirrel and Billy Possum and Mr. Rabbit, and even Mr. Badger, was prevailed upon to break his habit of staying at home in the daytime. All of them followed Reddy Fox down by the river and hid behind the bushes nearby.

"I really do not like this," said gentle Mr. Badger. "Something tells me I should not have come." And he flattened himself on the ground until he looked like a doormat, Reddy Fox said.

Mr. Raccoon had been watching from the top of a tree and saw all the wood folk following Mr. Reddy down to the river. "Going to give me the laugh, I suppose when I wash my food? Well, we will see who does the laughing, my friends and neighbors. I rather think it won't be Mr. Fox, anyway; and I am sure you all will

be surprised."

Mr. Raccoon was so full of laugh that he could hardly get down the tree thinking of what was going to happen, for he knew that the river bottom was muddy and the water not very deep. It was deep enough for him to wash his food without stirring it up and to help him to carry out the plan he had in mind to give all the watchers a surprise.



Mr. Raccoon shuffled off home to get his basket, while all the animals arranged themselves behind the bushes and, with listening ears, waited to see the fun. At last, they heard him, and peeping through the branches, they saw Mr. Raccoon dragging a basket along the ground; he was not carrying it on his arm, as usual.

"He has it chock-full this morning; it will be great fun to watch him," whispered Reddy to the others when he caught sight of Mr. Raccoon tugging the basket along. When Mr. Raccoon reached the river, he sat down and took the cover off his basket, and all the animals stretched their necks to see what he was going to do. Even Mr. Badger got up from his doormat position on the ground and looked too, leaning against the bushes with his forepaws to make himself taller.

Mr. Squirrel ran up one bush that was stronger than the others, so he could have all the view there was, and Mr. Rabbit hopped out to the very edge of the bushes close to a stone that was about the color of his coat, for he knew he would see but little of the strange sight from behind the bushes. Mr. Possum found a tree close by, and hanging by his tail from a low limb where he could not miss anything, he waited for what was to happen next. Reddy Fox could plainly see all that was going on, for he was never backward in coming forward when there was anything worth seeing.

Mr. Raccoon, of course, knew they were all there, and he did not hurry a bit. After he removed the cover, he reached slowly into the basket, looking across the river for a minute, and then when he felt sure they were all stretching their necks and watching, he suddenly tipped the basket.

But instead of the pieces of meat Reddy Fox had told them he had in the basket, Mr. Raccoon rolled into the river a rock that struck the bottom with such force that the muddy water splashed all around and covered the watchers from head to toes.

Mr. Raccoon looked very innocent as he picked up the cover and placed it on the basket, and then walked away. He could hear the wood folks scrambling about, trying to rub the mud from their coats, and he had hard work to wait until he was

out of sound and sight to laugh. But he did, and after rolling over and over on the ground and laughing as he thought how surprised the watchers must have been, he suddenly stopped and sat up, for he heard someone coming through the woods.

Mr. Raccoon jumped up and ran to a hiding place, and pretty soon he saw all the animals trudging along, dripping wet, and scolding Mr. Fox roundly for the trick they felt sure he had played on them.

"Now, listen," Reddy was saying, "he never did that before," but the wood folks would not believe him, for they said he was a foxy fellow and this was only another of his tricks.

Mr. Possum said his coat was spoiled, it was now a grayish white and it would not rub off, and Mr. Badger showed a soiled white front where the water had splashed on him when he stood on his hind legs to watch.

"I shall never be able to walk upright again," he said sadly, "for this mud will not rub off and I could never let anyone see that the front of my coat is not clean."

Mr. Rabbit did not say anything, but Mr. Squirrel chattered angrily as he ran off to tell everyone he knew about the muddy trick Reddy Fox had played upon his friends, and they all forgot about the strange habit they were told Mr. Raccoon had of washing his food. They were so busy being angry at Reddy Fox.

As he curled himself up for sleep in a high treetop, Mr. Raccoon thought that for one day he could go without eating meat, for he had turned the tables upon Reddy Fox, and he had been the one who laughed.

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