



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Uncle Wiggily And The Birch Tree

Howard R. Garis

Uncle Wiggily Longears, the nice old rabbit gentleman, was walking along through the woods one afternoon, when he came to the hollow stump school, where the lady mouse teacher taught the animal boys and girls how to jump, crack nuts, dig homes under ground, and do all manner of things that animal folk have to do.

And just as the rabbit gentleman was wondering whether or not school was out, he heard a voice inside the hollow stump, saying:

"Oh, dear! I wish I had some one to help me. I'll never get them clean all by myself. Oh, dear!"

"Ha! That sounds like trouble!" thought Mr. Longears to himself. "I wonder who it is, and if I can help? I guess I'd better see."

He looked in through a window, and there he saw the lady mouse teacher cleaning off the school black-boards. The boards were all covered with white chalk marks, you see.

"What's the matter, lady mouse teacher?" asked Uncle Wiggily, making a polite, low bow.

"Oh, I told Johnnie and Billy Bushytail, the two squirrel boys, to stay in and clean off the black-boards, so they would be all ready for tomorrow's lesson," said the lady mouse. "But they forgot, and ran off to play ball with Jackie and Peetie Bow Wow, the puppy dog boys. So I have to clean the boards myself. And I really ought to be home now, for I am very tired."

"Then you trot right along," said Uncle Wiggily, kindly. "Tie a knot in your tail, so you won't step on it, and hurry along."

"But what about the black-boards?" asked the lady mouse. "They must be cleaned off."

"I'll attend to that," promised the bunny uncle. "I will clean them myself. Run along, Miss Mouse."

So Miss Mouse thanked the bunny uncle, and ran along, and the rabbit gentleman began brushing the chalk marks off the black-boards, at the same time humming a little tune that went this way:

"I'd love to be a teacher,
 Within a hollow stump.
I'd teach the children how to fall,
 And never get a bump.

I'd let them out at recess,
 A game of tag to play;
I'd give them all fresh lollypops
 'Most every other day!"

"Oh, my! Wouldn't we just love to come to school to you!" cried a voice at the window, and, looking up. Uncle Wiggily saw Billie Bushytail, the boy squirrel, and brother Johnnie with him.

"Ha! What happened you two chaps?" asked the bunny uncle. "Why did you run off without cleaning the black-boards for the lady mouse teacher?"

"We forgot," said Johnnie, sort of ashamed-like and sorry. "That's what we came back to do—clean the boards."

"Well, that was good of you," spoke Uncle Wiggily. "But I have the boards nearly cleaned now."

"Then we will give them a dusting with our tails, and that will finish them," said Billie, and the squirrel boys did, so the black-boards were very clean.

"Now it's time to go home," said Uncle Wiggily. So he locked the school, putting the key under the doormat, where the lady mouse could find it in the morning, and, with the Bushytail squirrel boys, he started off through the woods.

"You and Billie can go back to your play, now, Johnnie," said the bunny uncle. "It was good of you to leave it to come back to do what you were told."

The three animal friends hopped and scrambled on together, until, all of a sudden, the bad old fox, who so often had made trouble for Uncle Wiggily, jumped out from behind a bush, crying:

"Ah, ha! Now I have you, Mr. Longears—and two squirrels besides. Good luck!"

"Bad luck!" whispered Billie.

The fox made a grab for the rabbit gentleman, but, all of a sudden, the paw of the bad creature slipped in some mud and down he went, head first, into a puddle of water, coughing and sneezing.

"Come on, Uncle Wiggily!" quickly cried Billie and Johnnie. "This is our chance. We'll run away before the fox gets the water out of his eyes. He can't see us now."

So away ran the rabbit gentleman and the squirrel boys, but soon the fox had dried his eyes on his big brush of a tail, and on he came after them.

"Oh, I'll get you! I'll get you!" he cried, running very fast. But Uncle Wiggily and Billie and Johnnie ran fast, too. The fox was coming closer, however, and Billie, looking back, said:

"Oh, I know what let's do, Uncle Wiggily. Let's take the path that leads over the duck pond ocean. That's shorter, and we can get to your bungalow before the fox can catch us. He won't dare come across the bridge over the duck pond, for Old Dog Percival will come out and bite him if he does."

"Very well," said Uncle Wiggily, "over the bridge we will go."

But alas! Also sorrowfulness and sadness! When the three friends got to the bridge it wasn't there. The wind had blown the bridge down, and there was no way of getting across the duck pond ocean, for neither Uncle Wiggily nor the squirrel boys could swim very well.

"Oh, what are we going to do?" cried Billie, sadly.

"We must get across somehow!" chattered Johnnie, "for here comes the fox!"

And, surely enough the fox was coming, having by this time gotten all the water out of his eyes, so he could see very well.

"Oh, if we only had a boat!" exclaimed Uncle Wiggily, looking along the shore of the pond, but there was no boat to be seen.

Nearer and nearer came the fox! Uncle Wiggily and the squirrel boys were just going to jump in the water, whether or not they could swim, when, all at once, a big white birch tree on the edge of the woods near the pond, said:

"Listen, Uncle Wiggily and I will save you. Strip off some of my bark. It will not hurt me, and you can make a little canoe boat of it, as the Indians used to do. Then, in the birch bark boat you can sail across the water and the fox can't get you."

"Good! Thank you!" cried the bunny uncle. With their sharp teeth he, Billie and Johnnie peeled off long strips of birch bark. They quickly bent them in the shape of a boat and sewed up the ends with long thorns for needles and ribbon grass for thread.

"Quick! Into the birch bark boat!" cried Uncle Wiggily, and they all jumped in, just as the fox came along. Billie and Johnnie held up their bushy tails, and Uncle Wiggily held up his tall silk hat for sails, and soon they were safe on the other shore and the fox, not being able to swim, could not get them.

So that's how the birch tree of the woods saved the bunny uncle and the

squirrels, for which, I am very glad, as I want to write more stories about them.



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