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READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Uncle Wiggily's Valentine

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Uncle Wiggily quickly hopped across the room and closed the door of his hollow stump bungalow, where he was busy in the sitting room. He heard Nurse Jane Fuzzy Wuzzy coming along.

"Well, that's queer!" exclaimed the muskrat lady housekeeper, as she noticed what Uncle Wiggily did. "I wonder what he means? Wiggy," she called, "are you getting ready for some strange, new adventure, such as stopping bad boys from tying tin cans on dogs' tails?"

"Nothing like that now; no, my dear," answered the bunny rabbit, and he quickly pulled the table cover over something he had been looking at. "This is a secret!"

"Oh—a secret!" exclaimed Nurse Jane, puzzled-like.

The muskrat lady looked at a calendar hanging on the wall, and noticed that the day was February 14.

"I think I can guess what your secret is, Uncle Wiggily," she said to herself. "I s'pose it's something for Mrs. Twistytail, the pig lady, or maybe for Grandpa Goosey Gander. Well, I hope you enjoy it."

Then Nurse Jane went back to the dining room, where she was giving the dishes their morning bath; and Uncle Wiggily began to rustle some paper and tie knots in a piece of gold string, the while murmuring to himself: "I hope she likes it! Oh, I do hope she likes it. I'll put it on the steps, throw a stone at the door so she thinks someone is knocking, and then I'll run and hide behind a bush and watch how surprised she is when she opens it."

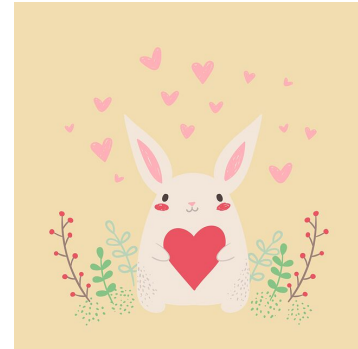
Uncle Wiggily had been very busy all that morning, after having been out in the woods the day before. What he had made I shall tell you about in a little while. Enough now for you to know that the bunny rabbit had something he did not want Nurse Jane to see.

Pretty soon, after opening the door a crack, and listening to Miss Fuzzy Wuzzy wash the face of the clock, Uncle Wiggily hopped softly out and down the front steps, with a box under his paw. His tall silk hat was on rather sideways, and he carried his red, white and blue striped rheumatism crutch upside down, but when you remember that it was February 14, I think you will kindly excuse the bunny gentleman.

Uncle Wiggily hopped on through the woods, and over the fields. Every now and then he would stop, and, with his crutch, brush to one side the dried leaves and little heaps of snow that were scattered here and there in the forest.

"I hope I may find some," said Mr. Longears to himself. "It won't be half so pretty without them. I hope I find some."

He searched in many places, and at last he found what he was looking for. Carefully he picked something up off the ground, and put it in the box he carried.



"Nurse Jane will surely like this," said the bunny gentleman. He was about to hop on again when, all of a sudden, he heard someone crying in the woods. There was a sobbing sound and, looking around the corner of a tree, Uncle Wiggily saw a little girl, sitting on a log. And she was crying as hard as she could cry!

"That isn't the Freckled Girl," said the bunny gentleman to himself. "She said she wouldn't mind her freckles after she looked at the pretty speckled birds' eggs. It isn't the Freckled Girl. I wonder who she is, and what's the matter?"

And pretty soon Uncle Wiggily found out, for he heard the sobbing girl say:

"Oh, I wish I had money enough to buy one! All the other girls and boys can buy valentines to send teacher, but I can't! And she'll think I don't like her, but I do! Oh, I wish I had a valentine!"

"My goodness me sakes alive and some peanut pudding!" whispered the bunny rabbit gentleman. "That girl is crying because she hasn't a valentine for her teacher!"

Then the bunny gentleman looked down at the box, wrapped in tissue paper, which he carried under his paw—the box in which he had placed something he had found under the leaves and snow of the forest a little while before.

"She wants a valentine," murmured the bunny rabbit gentleman. "And here I have one that I made for Nurse Jane. I was going to leave it on the steps and surprise my muskrat lady housekeeper. But I suppose I could give it to this little girl, and—well, Nurse Jane won't care, when I tell her."

"I'll do it! I'll give this girl my valentine," said Uncle Wiggily so suddenly that his pink nose almost twinkled backward.

He looked over the top of a bush behind which he had sat down to wrap up Nurse Jane's valentine. Then the bunny hopped over to the girl who sat on the log, still sobbing because she had no token for her teacher. The girl heard the

rustling in the leaves, made by Uncle Wiggily's paws as he hopped, and she looked up suddenly. Then she rubbed her eyes, hardly able to believe what she saw.

"Why! Why!" she murmured. "Am I dreaming? Is this a fairy? A rabbit gentleman, dressed in a tall silk hat, and with his red, white and blue striped rheumatism crutch! Oh! Why, it's Uncle Wiggily! It's Uncle Wiggily out of my Bedtime Story Books! Oh, how glad I am to see you, dear Uncle Wiggily! Please come up and sit by me on this log!"

But Uncle Wiggily was not allowed to do this. He put his paw over his lips, to show that though he could hear, and understand what the girl said, he could not talk to her in reply. Then he placed his valentine beside her on the log and quickly hopped away.

"Oh, Uncle Wiggily! Wait a minute! Please wait a minute!" cried the girl, but the bunny gentleman dared not stay.

"I must try and find Nurse Jane another valentine," he said to himself, as he skipped along the woodland paths.

Left alone, the girl on the log opened the box Uncle Wiggily had left. It was made from pieces of white birch bark, such as the Indians used for their canoes. Inside, were some sprigs from an evergreen tree, with some round, brown buttons from the sycamore tree. And in the middle of the evergreen sprigs were some lovely pink and white blossoms of the trailing arbutus—the earliest flower of Spring—growing under the leaves and late snows. It was these arbutus flowers which the bunny had come to the woods to find and complete his valentine. Now he had given it to the girl.

"Oh, how lovely!" she murmured, tears no longer in her eyes. "Won't teacher be surprised when I put this on her desk and tell her Uncle Wiggily gave it to me? Oh, there's a verse, too!"

And there was! Written on a piece of white birch bark, which is what the animal folk use instead of paper, was this little verse: "These twigs of cedar, like my heart, Are ever green for you. The blossoms whisper that I am Your Valentine so true!"

"I know teacher will just love this!" said the little girl, and she was so excited she could hardly run to school. She had to hop and skip.

"Here's a valentine Uncle Wiggily gave me in the woods," the little girl told her teacher, all excited and out of breath.

"Uncle Wiggily? How strange!" exclaimed the teacher. "I—I hope you didn't dream it," she said to the little girl. "But, at any rate, the valentine is real. And

how lovely! It's the very nicest one I ever saw!"

Then you can imagine how pleased the little girl was. Uncle Wiggily, hopping back to his bungalow through the woods, gnawed a piece of white birch bark off a tree, and, with a burned, black stick for a pencil, he scribbled on it: "Dear Nurse Jane: This is my valentine. I love you!"

And when the muskrat lady found that on the doorstep a little later, she laughed and said it was the nicest valentine she could wish for. And when Uncle Wiggily told about giving the other valentine to the sad little girl, the muskrat lady said: "You did just right, Wiggy! Now let's go to the movies!"

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