



CHAPTER 10

THE WHITEWATCHERS



*Much may be gained by sitting still
If you but have the strength of will.*

—Whitefoot.

Jumper the Hare crouched at the foot of a tree in the Green Forest, and a little way from him on a stump sat Whitey the Snowy Owl. Had you been there to see them, both would have appeared as white as the snow around them unless you had looked very closely. Then you might have seen two narrow black lines back of Jumper's head. They were the tips of his ears, for these remain black. And near the upper part of the white mound which was Whitey you might have seen two round yellow spots, his eyes.

There they were for all the world like two little heaps of snow. Jumper didn't move so much as a hair. Whitey didn't move so much as a feather. Both were waiting and watching. Jumper didn't move because he knew that Whitey was there. Whitey didn't move because he didn't want any one to know he was there, and didn't know that Jumper was there. Jumper was sitting still because he was afraid. Whitey was sitting still because he was hungry.

So there they sat, each in plain sight of the other but only one seeing the other. This was because Juniper had been fortunate enough to see Whitey alight on that stump. Jumper had been sitting still when Whitey arrived, and so those fierce yellow eyes had not yet seen him. But had Jumper so much as lifted one of those long ears, Whitey would have seen, and his great claws would have been reaching for Jumper.

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Jumper didn't want to sit still. No, indeed! He wanted to run. You know it is on those long legs of his that Jumper depends almost wholly for safety. But there are times for running and times for sitting still, and this was a time for sitting still. He knew that Whitey didn't know that he was anywhere near. But just the same it was hard, very hard to sit there with one he so greatly feared watching so near. It seemed as if those fierce yellow eyes of Whitey must see him. They seemed to look right through him. They made him shake inside.

"I want to run. I want to run. I want to run," Jumper kept saying to himself. Then he would say, "But I mustn't. I mustn't. I mustn't." And so Jumper did the hardest thing in the world,—sat still and stared danger in the face. He was sitting still to save his life.

Whitey the Snowy Owl was sitting still to catch a dinner. I know that sounds queer, but it was so. He knew that so long as he sat still, he was not likely to be seen. It was for this purpose that Old Mother Nature had given him that coat of white. In the Far North, which was his real home, everything is white for months and months, and any one dressed in a dark suit can be seen a long distance. So Whitey had been given that white coat that he might have a better chance to catch food enough to keep him alive.

And he had learned how to make the best use of it. Yes, indeed, he knew how to make the best use of it. It was by doing just what he was doing now,—sitting perfectly still. Just before he had alighted on that stump he had seen something move at the entrance to a little round hole in the snow. He was sure of it.

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“A Mouse,” thought Whitey, and alighted on that stump. “He saw me flying, but he’ll forget about it after a while and will come out again. He won’t see me then if I don’t move. And I won’t move until he is far enough from that hole for me to catch him before he can get back to it.”

So the two watchers in white sat without moving for the longest time, one watching for a dinner and the other watching the other watcher.