



CHAPTER 11

JUMPER IS IN DOUBT



*When doubtful what course to pursue
'Tis sometimes best to nothing do.*

—Whitefoot.

Jumper the Hare was beginning to feel easier in his mind. He was no longer shaking inside. In fact, he was beginning to feel quite safe. There he was in plain sight of Whitey the Snowy Owl, sitting motionless on a stump only a short distance away, yet Whitey hadn't seen him. Whitey had looked straight at him many times, but because Jumper had not moved so much as a hair Whitey had mistaken him for a little heap of snow.

“All I have to do is to keep right on sitting perfectly still, and I'll be as safe as if Whitey were nowhere about. Yes, sir, I will,” thought Jumper. “By and by he will become tired and fly away. I do hope he'll do that before Whitefoot comes out again. If Whitefoot should come out, I couldn't warn him because that would draw Whitey's attention to me, and he wouldn't look twice at a Wood Mouse when there was a chance to get a Hare for his dinner.

“This is a queer world. It is so. Old Mother Nature does queer things. Here she has given me a white coat in winter so that I may not be easily seen when there is snow on the ground, and at the same time she has given one of those I fear most a white coat so that he may not be easily seen, either. It certainly is a queer world.”

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Jumper forgot that Whitey was only a chance visitor from the Far North and that it was only once in a great while that he came down there, while up in the Far North where he belonged nearly everybody was dressed in white.

Jumper hadn't moved once, but once in a while Whitey turned his great round head for a look all about in every direction. But it was done in such a way that only eyes watching him sharply would have noticed it. Most of the time he kept his fierce yellow eyes fixed on the little hole in the snow in which Whitefoot had disappeared. You know Whitey can see by day quite as well as any other bird.

Jumper, having stopped worrying about himself, began to worry about Whitefoot. He knew that Whitefoot had seen Whitey arrive on that stump and that was why he had dodged back into his hole and since then had not even poked his nose out. But that had been so long ago that by this time Whitefoot must think that Whitey had gone on about his business, and Jumper expected to see Whitefoot appear any moment. What Jumper didn't know was that Whitefoot's bright little eyes had all the time been watching Whitey from another little hole in the snow some distance away. A tunnel led from this little hole to the first little hole.

Suddenly off among the trees something moved. At least, Jumper thought he saw something move. Yes, there it was, a little black spot moving swiftly this way and that way over the snow. Jumper stared very hard. And then his heart seemed to jump right up in his throat. It did so. He felt as if he would choke. That black spot was the tip end of a tail, the tail of a small, very slim fellow dressed all in white, the only other one in all the Green Forest who dresses all in white. It was Shadow the Weasel! In his white winter coat he is called Ermine.

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He was running this way and that way, back and forth, with his nose to the snow. He was hunting, and Jumper knew that sooner or later Shadow would find him. Safety from Shadow lay in making the best possible use of those long legs of his, but to do that would bring Whitey the Owl swooping after him. What to do Jumper didn't know. And so he did nothing. It happened to be the wisest thing he could do.