



CHAPTER 13

WHITEFOOT DECIDES QUICKLY



Your mind made up a certain way

Be swift to act; do not delay.

—Whitefoot.

When Whitefoot had discovered Whitey the Snowy Owl, he had dodged down in the little hole in the snow beside which he had been sitting. He had not been badly frightened. But he was somewhat upset. Yes, sir, he was somewhat upset. You see, he had so many enemies to watch out for, and here was another.

“Just as if I didn’t have troubles enough without having this white robber to add to them,” grumbled Whitefoot. “Why doesn’t he stay where he belongs, way up in the Far North? It must be that food is scarce up there. Well, now that I know he is here, he will have to be smarter than I think he is to catch me. I hope Jumper the Hare will have sense enough to keep perfectly still. I’ve sometimes envied him his long legs, but I guess I am better off than he is, at that. Once he has been seen by an enemy, only those long legs of his can save him, but I have a hundred hiding-places down under the snow. Whitey is watching the hole where I disappeared; he thinks I’ll come out there again after a while. I’ll fool him.”

Whitefoot scampered along through a little tunnel and presently very cautiously peeped out of another little round hole in the snow. Sure enough, there was Whitey the Snowy Owl back to him on a stump, watching the hole down which he had disappeared a few minutes before. Whitefoot grinned. Then he looked over to where he had last seen Jumper. Jumper was still there; it was clear that he hadn’t moved,

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and so Whitey hadn't seen him. Again Whitefoot grinned. Then he settled himself to watch patiently for Whitey to become tired of watching that hole and fly away.

So it was that Whitefoot saw all that happened. He saw Whitey suddenly sail out on silent wings from that stump and swoop with great claws reaching for some one. And then he saw who that some one was, — Shadow the Weasel! He saw Shadow dodge in the very nick of time. Then he watched Whitey swoop again and again as Shadow dodged this way and that way. Finally both disappeared amongst the trees. Then he turned just in time to see Jumper the Hare bounding away with all the speed of his wonderful, long legs.

Fear, the greatest fear he had known for a long time, took possession of Whitefoot. "Shadow the Weasel!" he gasped and had such a thing been possible he certainly would have turned pale. "Whitey won't catch him; Shadow is too quick for him. And when Whitey has given up and flown away, Shadow will come back. He probably had found the tracks of Jumper the Hare and he will come back. I know him; he'll come back. Jumper is safe enough from him now, because he has such a long start, but Shadow will be sure to find one of my holes in the snow. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! What shall I do?"

You see Shadow the Weasel is the one enemy that can follow Whitefoot into most of his hiding-places.

For a minute or two Whitefoot sat there, shaking with fright. Then he made up his mind. "I'll get away from here before he returns," thought Whitefoot. "I've got to. I've spent a comfortable winter here so far, but there will be no safety for me here any longer. I don't know where to go, but anywhere will be better than here now."

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Without waiting another second, Whitefoot scampered away. And how he did hope that his scent would have disappeared by the time Shadow returned. If it hadn't, there would be little hope for him and he knew it.