



CHAPTER 15

WHITEFOOT'S DREADFUL JOURNEY



*Danger may be anywhere,
So I expect it everywhere.*
—Whitefoot.

Whitefoot the Wood Mouse was terribly frightened. Yes, sir, he was terribly frightened. It was a long, long time since he had been as frightened as he now was. He is used to frights, is Whitefoot. He has them every day and every night, but usually they are sudden frights, quickly over and as quickly forgotten.

This fright was different. You see Whitefoot had caught a glimpse of Shadow the Weasel. And he knew that if Shadow returned he would be sure to find the little round holes in the snow that led down to Whitefoot's private little tunnels underneath.

The only thing for Whitefoot to do was to get just as far from that place as he could before Shadow should return. And so poor little Whitefoot started out on a journey that was to take him he knew not where. All he could do was to go and go and go until he could find a safe hiding-place.

My, my, but that was a dreadful journey! Every time a twig snapped, Whitefoot's heart seemed to jump right up in his throat. Every time he saw a moving shadow, and the branches of the trees moving in the wind were constantly making moving shadows on the snow, he dodged behind a tree trunk or under a piece of bark or wherever he could find a hiding-place.

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You see, Whitefoot has so many enemies always looking for him that he hides whenever he sees anything moving. When at home, he is forever dodging in and out of his hiding-places. So, because everything was strange to him, and because of the great fear of Shadow the Weasel, he suspected everything that moved and every sound he heard. For a long way no one saw him, for no one was about. Yet all that way Whitefoot twisted and dodged and darted from place to place and was just as badly frightened as if there had been enemies all about.

“Oh, dear! Oh, dear me!” he kept saying over and over to himself. “Wherever shall I go? Whatever shall I do? However shall I get enough to eat? I won’t dare go back to get food from my little storehouses, and I shall have to live in a strange place where I won’t know where to look for food. I am getting tired. My legs ache. I’m getting hungry. I want my nice, warm, soft bed. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Oh, dear me!”

But in spite of his frights, Whitefoot kept on. You see, he was more afraid to stop than he was to go on. He just had to get as far from Shadow the Weasel as he could. Being such a little fellow, what would be a short distance for you or me is a long distance for Whitefoot.

And so that journey was to him very long indeed. Of course, it seemed longer because of the constant frights which came one right after another. It really was a terrible journey. Yet if he had only known it, there wasn’t a thing along the whole way to be afraid of. You know it often happens that people are frightened more by what they don’t know than by what they do know.