



CHAPTER 16

WHITEFOOT CLIMBS A TREE



*I'd rather be frightened
With no cause for fear
Than fearful of nothing
When danger is near.
—Whitefoot.*

Whitefoot kept on going and going. Every time he thought that he was so tired he must stop, he would think of Shadow the Weasel and then go on again. By and by he became so tired that not even the thought of Shadow the Weasel could make him go much farther. So he began to look about for a safe hiding-place in which to rest.

Now the home which he had left had been a snug little room beneath the roots of a certain old stump. There he had lived for a long time in the greatest comfort. Little tunnels led to his storehouses and up to the surface of the snow. It had been a splendid place and one in which he had felt perfectly safe until Shadow the Weasel had appeared. Had you seen him playing about there, you would have thought him one of the little people of the ground, like his cousin Danny Meadow Mouse.

But Whitefoot is quite as much at home in trees as on the ground. In fact, he is quite as much at home in trees as is Chatterer the Red Squirrel, and a lot more at home in trees than is Striped Chipmunk, although Striped Chipmunk belongs to the Squirrel family. So now that he must find a hiding-place, Whitefoot decided that he would feel much safer in a tree than on the ground.

Chapter 16 -- Whitefoot Climbs a Tree

“If only I can find a hollow tree,” whimpered Whitefoot. “I will feel ever so much safer in a tree than hiding in or near the ground in a strange place.”

So Whitefoot began to look for a dead tree. You see, he knew that there was more likely to be a hollow in a dead tree than in a living tree. By and by he came to a tall, dead tree. He knew it was a dead tree, because there was no bark on it. But, of course, he couldn't tell whether or not that tree was hollow. I mean he couldn't tell from the ground.

“Oh, dear!” he whimpered again. “Oh, dear! I suppose I will have to climb this, and I am so tired. It ought to be hollow. There ought to be splendid holes in it. It is just the kind of a tree that Drummer the Woodpecker likes to make his house in. I shall be terribly disappointed if I don't find one of his houses somewhere in it, but I wish I hadn't got to climb it to find out. Well, here goes.”

He looked anxiously this way. He looked anxiously that way. He looked anxiously the other way. In fact, he looked anxiously every way.

But he saw no one and nothing to be afraid of, and so he started up the tree.

He was half-way up when, glancing down, he saw a shadow moving across the snow. Once more Whitefoot's heart seemed to jump right up in his throat. That shadow was the shadow of some one flying. There couldn't be the least bit of doubt about it. Whitefoot flattened himself against the side of the tree and peeked around it. He was just in time to see a gray and black and white bird almost the size of Sammy Jay alight in the very next tree. He had come along near the ground and then risen sharply into the tree. His bill was black, and there was just a tiny hook on the end of it. Whitefoot knew who it was. It was Butcher the Shrike. Whitefoot shivered.