



CHAPTER 26

LOVE FILLS THE HEART OF WHITEFOOT



*Joyous all the winds that blow
To the heart with love aglow.*

—Whitefoot.

It was a wonderful game of hide-and-seek that Whitefoot the Woodmouse was playing in the dusk of early evening. Whitefoot was "it" all the time. That is, he was the one who had to do all the hunting. Just who he was hunting for he didn't know. He knew it was another Woodmouse, but it was a stranger, and do what he would, he couldn't get so much as a glimpse of this little stranger. He would drum with his feet and after a slight pause there would be an answering drum. Then Whitefoot would run as fast as he could in that direction only to find no one at all. Then he would drum again and the reply would come from another direction.

Every moment Whitefoot became more excited. He forgot everything, even danger, in his desire to see that little drummer. Once or twice he actually lost his temper in his disappointment. But this was only for a moment. He was too eager to find that little drummer to be angry very long.

At last there came a time when there was no reply to his drumming. He drummed and listened, then drummed again and listened. Nothing was to be heard. There was no reply. Whitefoot's heart sank.

All the old lonesomeness crept over him again. He didn't know which way to turn to look for that stranger. When he had drummed until he was tired, he sat on the end of

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an old log, a perfect picture of disappointment. He was so disappointed that he could have cried if it would have done any good.

Just as he had about made up his mind that there was nothing to do but to try to find his way home, his keen little ears caught the faintest rustle of dry leaves. Instantly Whitefoot was alert and watchful. Long ago he had learned to be suspicious of rustling leaves. They might have been rustled by the feet of an enemy stealing up on him. No Woodmouse who wants to live long is ever heedless of rustling leaves. As still as if he couldn't move, Whitefoot sat staring at the place from which that faint sound had seemed to come. For two or three minutes he heard and saw nothing. Then another leaf rustled a little bit to one side. Whitefoot turned like a flash, his feet gathered under him ready for a long jump for safety.

At first he saw nothing. Then he became aware of two bright, soft little eyes watching him. He stared at them very hard and then all over him crept those funny thrills he had felt when he had first heard the drumming of the stranger. He knew without being told that those eyes belonged to the little drummer with whom he had been playing hide and seek so long.

Whitefoot held his breath, he was so afraid that those eyes would vanish. Finally he rather timidly jumped down from the log and started toward those two soft eyes. They vanished. Whitefoot's heart sank. He was tempted to rush forward, but he didn't. He sat still. There was a slight rustle off to the right. A little ray of moonlight made its way down through the branches of the trees just there, and in the middle of the light spot it made sat a timid little person. It seemed to Whitefoot that he was looking at the most beautiful Woodmouse in all the Great World. Suddenly he felt very shy and timid himself.

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“Who—who—who are you?” he stammered.

“I am little Miss Dainty,” replied the stranger bashfully.

Right then and there Whitefoot’s heart was filled so full of something that it seemed as if it would burst. It was love. All in that instant he knew that he had found the most wonderful thing in all the Great World, which of course is love. He knew that he just couldn’t live without little Miss Dainty.