

The Tale of Brownie Beaver

CHAPTER 9: THE SIGN ON THE TREE

by Arthur Scott Bailey



On one of Brownie Beaver's long excursions down the stream he came upon a tree to which a sign was nailed. Now, Brownie had never learned to read. But he had heard that Uncle Jerry Chuck could tell what a sign said. So Brownie asked a pleasant young fellow named Frisky Squirrel if he would mind asking Uncle Jerry to come over to Swift River on a matter of important business.

When Uncle Jerry Chuck appeared, Brownie Beaver said he was glad to see him and that Uncle Jerry was looking very well.


"I've sent for you," said Brownie, "because I wanted you to see this sign. I can tell by the tracks under the tree that the sign was put up only today. And I thought you ought to know about it at once, Uncle Jerry."

As soon as he heard that, Uncle Jerry Chuck stepped close to the tree and began to read the sign.

Now, there was something about Uncle Jerry's reading that Brownie Beaver had heard. People had told him that Uncle Jerry Chuck couldn't tell what a sign said unless he read it aloud. That was why Brownie Beaver had sent for him, for Brownie knew Uncle Jerry well enough to guess that if anybody asked Uncle Jerry to read the sign, Uncle Jerry would insist on being paid for his trouble.

But now Uncle Jerry was going to read the sign for himself. And Brownie Beaver moved up beside him, to hear what he said.

The sign looked like this:



NO HUNTING
OR FISHING
ALOUD

Uncle Jerry repeated the words in a sing-song tone.

“I don’t think much of that,” he said. “It’s bad enough to be hunted by people who make a noise, though you have some chance of getting away then. But if they can’t make a noise it will be much more dangerous for all of us forest-people.”

If Tommy Fox hadn’t happened to come along just then Uncle Jerry wouldn’t have found out his mistake. But Tommy Fox soon set him right. As soon as he had talked a bit with Uncle Jerry he said:

“What the sign really means is that no hunting or fishing will be permitted. That last word should be ‘allowed,’ instead of ‘aloud.’ It’s spelled wrong,” he explained.

“That’s better!” Uncle Jerry cried. “Now there’ll be no more hunting in the neighborhood and we’ll all be quite safe.... Farmer Green is kinder than I supposed.”

When Brownie Beaver heard that, he said good-by and started home at once to tell the good news to all his friends. He had leaped into the river and was swimming up-stream rapidly when Uncle Jerry called to him to stop.



“There’s something I want to say,” Uncle Jerry shouted. “I think you ought to pay me for reading the sign.”

But Brownie Beaver shook his head.

“I didn’t ask you to read the sign for me,” he declared. “You read it for yourself, Uncle Jerry. And besides, you didn’t know what it meant until Tommy Fox came along and told you.... If you want to know what I think, I’ll tell you. I think you ought to pay Tommy Fox something.”

Uncle Jerry at once began to look worried. He said nothing more, but plunged out of sight into some bushes, as if he were afraid Tommy Fox might come back and find him.