



CHAPTER 14

SHADOW'S RETURN



*He little gains and has no pride
Who from his purpose turns aside.
—Whitefoot.*

Shadow the Weasel believes in persistence. When he sets out to do a thing, he keeps at it until it is done or he knows for a certainty it cannot be done. He is not easily discouraged. This is one reason he is so feared by the little people he delights to hunt. They know that once he gets on their trail, they will be fortunate indeed if they escape him.

When Whitey the Snowy Owl swooped at him and so nearly caught him, he was not afraid as he dodged this way and that way. Any other of the little people with the exception of his cousin, Billy Mink, would have been frightened half to death. But Shadow was simply angry. He was angry that any one should try to catch him. He was still more angry because his hunt for Jumper the Hare was interfered with. You see, he had just found Jumper's trail when Whitey swooped at him.

So Shadow's little eyes grew red with rage as he dodged this way and that and was gradually driven away from the place where he had found the trail of Jumper the Hare. At last he saw a hole in an old log and into this he darted. Whitey couldn't get him there. Whitey knew this and he knew, too, that waiting for Shadow to come out again would be a waste of time. So Whitey promptly flew away.

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Hardly had he disappeared when Shadow popped out of that hole, for he had been peeping out and watching Whitey. Without a moment's pause he turned straight back for the place where he had found the trail of Jumper the Hare. He had no intention of giving up that hunt just because he had been driven away. Straight to the very spot where Whitey had first swooped at him he ran, and there once more his keen little nose took up the trail of Jumper. It led him straight to the foot of the tree where Jumper had crouched so long.

But, as you know, Jumper wasn't there then. Shadow ran in a circle and presently he found where Jumper had landed on the snow at the end of that first bound. Shadow snarled. He understood exactly what had happened.

"Jumper was under that tree when that white robber from the Far North tried to catch me, and he took that chance to leave in a hurry. I can tell that by the length of this jump. Probably he is still going. It is useless to follow him because he has too long a start," said Shadow, and he snarled again in rage and disappointment.

Then, for such is his way, he wasted no more time or thought on Jumper the Hare. Instead he began to look for other trails. So it was that he found one of the little holes of Whitefoot the Wood Mouse.

"Ha! So this is where Whitefoot has been living this winter!" he exclaimed. Once more his eyes glowed red, but this time with eagerness and the joy of the hunt. He plunged down into that little hole in the snow. Down there the scent of Whitefoot was strong. Shadow followed it until it led out of another little hole in the snow. But there he lost it. You see, it was so long since Whitefoot had hurriedly left that the scent on the surface had disappeared.

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Shadow ran swiftly this way and that way in a big circle, but he couldn't find Whitefoot's trail again. Snarling with anger and disappointment, he returned to the little hole in the snow and vanished. Then he followed all Whitefoot's little tunnels. He found Whitefoot's nest. He found his store of seeds. But he didn't find Whitefoot.

"He'll come back," muttered Shadow, and curled up in Whitefoot's nest to wait.