



CHAPTER 18

AN UNPLEASANT SURPRISE



*Be careful never to be rude
Enough to thoughtlessly intrude.
—Whitefoot.*

If ever anybody in the Great World felt relief and thankfulness, it was Whitefoot when he dodged into that hole in the dead tree just as Butcher the Shrike all but caught him. For a few minutes he did nothing but pant, for he was quite out of breath.

“I was right,” he said over and over to himself, “I was right. I was sure there must be a hole in this tree. It is one of the old houses of Drummer the Woodpecker. Now I am safe.”

Presently he peeped out. He wanted to see if Butcher was watching outside. He was just in time to see Butcher’s gray and black and white coat disappearing among the trees. Butcher was not foolish enough to waste time watching for Whitefoot to come out. Whitefoot sighed happily. For the first time since he had started on his dreadful journey he felt safe. Nothing else mattered. He was hungry, but he didn’t mind that. He was willing to go hungry for the sake of being safe.

Whitefoot watched until Butcher was out of sight. Then he turned to see what that house was like. Right away he discovered that there was a soft, warm bed in it. It was made of leaves, grass, moss, and the lining of bark. It was a very fine bed indeed.

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“My, my, my, but I am lucky,” said Whitefoot to himself. “I wonder who could have made this fine bed. I certainly shall sleep comfortably here. Goodness knows, I need a rest. If I can find food enough near here, I’ll make this my home. I couldn’t ask for a better one.”

Chuckling happily, Whitefoot began to pull away the top of that bed so as to get to the middle of it. And then he got a surprise. It was an unpleasant surprise. It was a most unpleasant surprise. There was some one in that bed! Yes, sir, there was some one curled up in a little round ball in the middle of that fine bed. It was some one with a coat of the softest, finest fur. Can you guess who it was? It was Timmy the Flying Squirrel.

It seemed to Whitefoot as if his heart flopped right over. You see at first he didn’t recognize Timmy. Whitefoot is himself so very timid that his thought was to run; to get out of there as quickly as possible. But he had no place to run to, so he hesitated. Never in all his life had Whitefoot had a greater disappointment. He knew now that this splendid house was not for him.

Timmy the Flying Squirrel didn’t move. He remained curled up in a soft little ball. He was asleep. Whitefoot remembered that Timmy sleeps during the day and seldom comes out until the Black Shadows come creeping out from the Purple Hills at the close of day. Whitefoot felt easier in his mind then. Timmy was so sound asleep that he knew nothing of his visitor. And so Whitefoot felt safe in staying long enough to get rested. Then he would go out and hunt for another home.

So down in the middle of that soft, warm bed Timmy the Flying Squirrel, curled up in a little round ball with his flat tail wrapped around him, slept peacefully, and on top of that soft bed Whitefoot the Woodmouse rested and wondered what he should do

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next. Not in all the Green Forest could two more timid little people be found than the two in that old home of Drummer the Woodpecker.