



CHAPTER 19

WHITEFOOT FINDS A HOME AT LAST



*True independence he has known
Whose home has been his very own.*

—Whitefoot.

Curled up in his splendid warm bed, Timmy the Flying Squirrel slept peacefully. He didn't know he had a visitor. He didn't know that on top of that same bed lay Whitefoot the Woodmouse. Whitefoot wasn't asleep. No, indeed! Whitefoot was too worried to sleep. He knew he couldn't stay in that fine house because it belonged to Timmy. He knew that as soon as Timmy awoke, he, Whitefoot, would have to get out. Where should he go? He wished he knew. How he did long for the old home he had left. But when he thought of that, he remembered Shadow the Weasel. It was better to be homeless than to feel that at any minute Shadow the Weasel might appear.

It was getting late in the afternoon. Before long, jolly, round, red Mr. Sun would go to bed behind the Purple Hills, and the Black Shadows would come creeping through the Green Forest. Then Timmy the Flying Squirrel would awake. "It won't do for me to be here then," said Whitefoot to himself. "I must find some other place before he wakes. If only I knew this part of the Green Forest I might know where to go. As it is, I shall have to go hunt for a new home and trust to luck. Did ever a poor little Mouse have so much trouble?"

After awhile Whitefoot felt rested and peeped out of the doorway. No enemy was to be seen anywhere. Whitefoot crept out and climbed a little higher up in the tree. Presently he found another hole. He peeped inside and listened long and carefully.

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He didn't intend to make the mistake of going into another house where some one might be living.

At last, sure that there was no one in there, he crept in. Then he made a discovery. There were beech nuts in there and there were seeds.

It was a storehouse! Whitefoot knew at once that it must be Timmy's storehouse. Right away he realized how very, very hungry he was. Of course, he had no right to any of those seeds or nuts. Certainly not! That is, he wouldn't have had any right had he been a boy or girl. But it is the law of the Green Forest that whatever any one finds he may help himself to if he can.

So Whitefoot began to fill his empty little stomach with some of those seeds. He ate and ate and ate and quite forgot all his troubles. Just as he felt that he hadn't room for another seed, he heard the sound of claws outside on the trunk of the tree. In a flash he knew that Timmy the Flying Squirrel was awake, and that it wouldn't do to be found in there by him. In a jiffy Whitefoot was outside. He was just in time. Timmy was almost up to the entrance.

"Hi, there!" cried Timmy. "What were you doing in my storehouse?"

"I—I—I was looking for a new home," stammered Whitefoot.

"You mean you were stealing some of my food," snapped Timmy suspiciously.

"I—I—I did take a few seeds because I was almost starved. But truly I was looking for a new home," replied Whitefoot.

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"What was the matter with your old home?" demanded Timmy.

Then Whitefoot told Timmy all about how he had been obliged to leave his old home because of Shadow the Weasel, of the terrible journey he had had, and how he didn't know where to go or what to do. Timmy listened suspiciously at first, but soon he made up his mind that Whitefoot was telling the truth. The mere mention of Shadow the Weasel made him very sober.

He scratched his nose thoughtfully. "Over in that tall, dead stub you can see from here is an old home of mine," said he. "No one lives in it now. I guess you can live there until you can find a better home. But remember to keep away from my store-house."

So it was that Whitefoot found a new home.