



CHAPTER 22

TIMMY PROVES TO BE A TRUE NEIGHBOR



He proves himself a neighbor true

Who seeks a kindly deed to do.

—Whitefoot.

Occasionally Timmy the Flying Squirrel came over to visit Whitefoot. If Whitefoot was in his house he always knew when Timmy arrived. He would hear a soft thump down near the bottom of the tall stub. He would know instantly that thump was made by Timmy striking the foot of the stub after a long jump from the top of a tree. Whitefoot would poke his head out of his doorway and there, sure enough, would be Timmy scrambling up towards him.

Whitefoot had grown to admire Timmy with all his might. It seemed to him that Timmy was the most wonderful of all the people he knew. You see there was none of the others who could jump as Timmy could. Timmy on his part enjoyed having Whitefoot for a neighbor. Few of the little people of the Green Forest are more timid than Timmy the Flying Squirrel, but here was one beside whom Timmy actually felt bold. It was such a new feeling that Timmy enjoyed it.

So it was that in the dusk of early evening, just after the Black Shadows had come creeping out from the Purple Hills across the Green Meadows and through the Green Forest, these two little neighbors would start out to hunt for food. Whitefoot never went far from the tall, dead stub in which he was now living. He didn't dare to. He wanted to be where at the first sign of danger he could scamper back there to safety. Timmy would go some distance, but he was seldom gone long. He liked to be where

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he could watch and talk with Whitefoot. You see Timmy is very much like other people,—he likes to gossip a little.

One evening Whitefoot had found it hard work to find enough food to fill his stomach. He had kept going a little farther and a little farther from home. Finally he was farther from it than he had ever been before. Timmy had filled his stomach and from near the top of a tree was watching Whitefoot. Suddenly what seemed like a great Black Shadow floated right over the tree in which Timmy was sitting, and stopped on the top of a tall, dead tree. It was Hooty the Owl, and it was simply good fortune that Timmy happened to see him. Timmy did not move. He knew that he was safe so long as he kept perfectly still. He knew that Hooty didn't know he was there. Unless he moved, those great eyes of Hooty's, wonderful as they were, would not see him.

Timmy looked over to where he had last seen Whitefoot. There he was picking out seeds from a pine cone on the ground. The trunk of a tree was between him and Hooty. But Timmy knew that Whitefoot hadn't seen Hooty, and that any minute he might run out from behind that tree. If he did Hooty would see him, and silently as a shadow would swoop down and catch him. What was to be done?

"It's no business of mine," said Timmy to himself. "Whitefoot must look out for himself. It is no business of mine at all. Perhaps Hooty will fly away before Whitefoot moves. I don't want anything to happen to Whitefoot, but if something does, it will be his own fault; he should keep better watch."

For a few minutes nothing happened. Then Whitefoot finished the last seed in that cone and started to look for more. Timmy knew that in a moment Hooty would see Whitefoot. What do you think Timmy did? He jumped. Yes, sir, he jumped. Down, down, down, straight past the tree on which sat Hooty the Owl, Timmy sailed. Hooty

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saw him. Of course. He couldn't help but see him. He spread his great wings and was after Timmy in an instant. Timmy struck near the foot of a tree and without wasting a second darted around to the other side. He was just in time. Hooty was already reaching for him. Up the tree ran Timmy and jumped again. Again Hooty was too late. And so Timmy led Hooty the Owl away from Whitefoot the Woodmouse.