

THE ADVENTURES OF JERRY MUSKRAT

CHAPTER 5: A BUSY DAY AT THE SMILING POOL



BY THORNTON W. BURGESS



Everybody was excited. Yes, Sir. Everybody in the Smiling Pool and along the Laughing Brook was just bubbling over with excitement. Even Spotty the Turtle, who usually takes everything so calmly that some people think him stupid, climbed up on the highest point of an old log where he could see what was going on. Only Grandfather Frog, sitting on his big green lily pad and watching for foolish green flies for his breakfast, appeared not to know that something unusual was going on. Really, he was just as much excited as the rest, but because he is very old and accounted very, very wise, it would not do for him to show it.

What was it all about? Why, all the Minks and the Coons and the Otters and the Muskrats, who live and play around the Smiling Pool and the Laughing Brook, were hunting for traps. Yes, Sir, they were hunting for traps set by Farmer Brown's boy, just as Grandfather Frog had advised them to.

Jerry Muskrat and Little Joe Otter were hunting together. They were swimming along close to shore just where the Laughing Brook leaves the Smiling Pool, when Jerry wrinkled up his funny little nose and stopped swimming. Sniff, sniff, sniff, went Jerry Muskrat. Then little cold shivers ran down his backbone and way out to the tip of his tail.

"What is it?" asked Little Joe Otter.

"It's the man-smell," whispered Jerry.

Just then Little Joe Otter gave a long sniff. "My, I smell fish!" he cried, his eyes sparkling, and started in the direction from which the smell came. He swam faster than Jerry, and in a minute he shouted in delight.

"Hi, Jerry! Some one's left a fish on the edge of the bank: What a feast!"

Jerry hurried as fast as he could swim, his eyes popping out with fright, for the nearer he got, the stronger grew that dreadful man-smell. "Don't touch it," he panted. "Don't touch it, Joe Otter!"

Little Joe laughed. "What's the matter, Jerry? 'Fraid I'll eat it all up before you get here?" he asked, as he reached out for the fish.

"Stop!" shrieked Jerry, and gave Little Joe a push, just as the latter touched the fish.

Snap! A pair of wicked steel jaws flew together and caught Little Joe Otter by a claw of one toe. If it hadn't been for Jerry's push, he would have been caught by a foot.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" cried Little Joe Otter.

"Next time I guess you'll remember what Grandfather Frog said about watching out when you find things to eat where they never were before," said Jerry, as he helped Little Joe pull himself free from the trap. But he left the claw behind and had a dreadfully sore toe as a result. Then they buried the trap deep down in the mud and started to look for another.

All around the Smiling Pool and along the Laughing Brook their cousins and uncles and

aunts and friends were just as busy, and every once in a while some one would have just as narrow an escape as Little Joe Otter. And all the time up at the farmhouse Farmer Brown's boy was planning what he would do with the skins of the little animals he was sure he would catch in his traps.